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PLAYS OF THE YEAR

EDITED BY
J. C. TREWIN

THE GRASS IS GREENER

Hugh and Margaret Williams

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

Molière, adapted by Miles Malleson

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

Rosemary Anne Sisson

LET THEM EAT CAKE

Frederick Lonsdale

VOLUME 19

1958-59

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by Gilbert Miller

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IS ENOUGH) by Frederick Lonsdale

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FOR WENDY

Who Approves

INTRODUCTION

"I do not claim that they are the best plays of their period; I submit merely that all are good of their kind, and that they share qualities for which a true theatregoer looks."

(Preface to *Plays of the Year, Volume One* (1949))

I

Four plays, four periods: Hugh and Margaret Williams, in THE GRASS IS GREENER, write of the present; the late Frederick Lonsdale's LET THEM EAT CAKE has been back-dated to 1913; THE IMAGINARY INVALID is Miles Malleson's treatment of Molière's last play; and in THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS Rosemary Anne Sisson takes us to Italy of the Renaissance with Cesar and Lucretia Borgia.

First, THE GRASS IS GREENER. Frederick Lonsdale used to be our leading practitioner in earl-and-the-girl comedy. He made his own Debrett, and it was said affectionately of The High Road that it had in it every peer except Southend. He was fond, in particular, of the Dukedom of Bristol, though none, I think, could make much sense of the family tree except that Ronald Squire was usually on a prominent branch. Gilded comedy is less modish today, even if there must ever be a wistful sigh for those nights of epigram-tossing in mid-Dukeries. Now, however, the expert technician, Hugh Williams—an actor

as impeccable as a satirical exercise of Pope—is trifling among the titles. In the first of his three comedies (written with Margaret Williams) he appeared as the Earl of Hewlyn. In *THE GRASS IS GREENER*, he has moved to the Earldom of Rhyall: the fellow was clearly at school with Hewlyn—they have the same traits. This is the best of the comedies.* It has certain affinities with the other two: a very small cast, one set, swift, glancing wit in dialogue that is composed primarily to be spoken, a well-bred ease, a general reluctance to snarl. I could also say — if it were not, in the idiom of the time, a dirty word—that the play is neatly constructed.

Further, it is compact of the apparent irrelevances that it takes a theatrical imagination to conceive. At one moment (I write of the St Martin's performance) Hugh Williams is sitting in a chair down-stage, having just been wounded in a duel (off): pistols for two. His opponent, far more worried, is standing not far away. Between them is the butler, holding the duelling pistols gingerly, and looking—as he usually looks—hot and bothered. Into the room, anxious but decoratively, rush Celia Johnson and Joan Greenwood. Whereupon Miss Greenwood, viewing the mildly melodramatic scene, observes in that voice of hers that is like thin, charred toast, spread with new honey: “They’re all wearing glasses.” If you do not find this irrelevance funny on paper, it is very funny indeed in the situation. The dramatists have considered their comedy from the first in terms of the theatre, and that is a good basis for any play.

The present piece is matter for a May morning. I find it a blessed change from the Dolorous Drama, world-hating, deep in a dump: the kind of nonsense that is like the sound of people mooning at the bar at the end of a long evening. (Squeals of “I’ll pity you if you’ll pity me! How awful were your parents?”) The butler in *THE GRASS IS GREENER* sets the right note from the start. He is a frustrated novelist who explains that, being fundamentally

* *Plaintiff in a Pretty Hat* is published in Volume 15 of *Plays of the Year* and *The Happy Man* in Volume 17.

happy, he cannot hope to be a success. He hardly resents anything, and what in the world could be less contemporary than that? I dare say that Mr. and Mrs. Williams have been told from a great height (as well as in the remoter coffee-bars) that their comedy is just frivolous, that it is their duty to spread a little gloom and to stop being subversive. I hope myself that nothing whatever will lure them from their chosen path.

II

Back to 1673. *Le Malade Imaginaire* (in Miles Malleeson's version, *THE IMAGINARY INVALID*) was Molière's last play. While appearing as Argan at the fourth Palais Royal performance on February 17, 1673, he was seized with a fit, but finished the play, and at the end of it was carried to his house, where he died.

We have waited for Miles Malleeson to add this to his famous series of Molière versions,* free, supple, and vivacious. (During the spring of 1959 he acted in, and produced, *Sganarelle at the Old Vic*, and it was followed in the same bill by his version of *Tartuffe*, directed by Douglas Seale.) I have said often that Molière, as a man of the theatre, would have responded to Malleeson as another man of the theatre with a richly appreciative understanding of the texts. These versions serve our stage much better than those others (once popular) from the eighteenth century. Take such a speech as this from the eighteenth century text entitled *The Hypochondriack*: "These are mere notions which we love to feed ourselves with; and at all times some fine imaginations have crept in amongst men which we are apt to believe because they flatter us, and that 'twere to be wished they were true." It is from the passage between

* Other Molière-Malleeson versions in *Plays of the Year* have been *The Miser* (Volume 1), *Tartuffe* (Volume 3), *The Prodigious Snob* (Volume 6), *The School for Wives* (Volume 10), *The Misanthrope* and *Sganarelle* (Volume 11). See also Sir Barry Jackson's version of *Le Malade Imaginaire* as *Doctor's Delight* (Volume 5).

Argan and Béralde. Observe now, when you read THE IMAGINARY INVALID, how quickly and amusingly Malleeson has got to the core of this scene. But, throughout, the new rendering has the theatre in every word: I hope yet for a full Molière-Malleeson repertory season in the West End.

III

Back to the Borgias. Rosemary Anne Sisson, in her third play THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS, writes of the brother and sister—illegitimate children of the Pope—whose very name was seismic. The ducal States of Italy swayed when Cesar Borgia was on the march: the stamp of the black bull. The dramatist has suggested both the size and ruthless ambition of the man, and his love of beauty, his patronage of the arts. Most potently, in the present context, she shows his power of creating fear. Fear rode with him as part of his bodyguard. He inspired great and lasting loyalty; but his enemies trembled. It is no small task to put Cesar upon the stage, the autocrat that Machiavelli—for whom he embodied success and power—immortalised in The Prince. Rosemary Anne Sisson has done so. Already she has shown in the theatre how she can indicate terror, maintain suspense. THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS is often a study in terror, explicit or implied: "We trust no one, and no one trusts us." It is also, and first, a study of Cesar's influence upon Lucretia, a woman who loved once and profoundly, but who was always in subjection to her brother's dominating will.

I imagine this play will surprise people who think of Lucretia in terms of poisoned-goblet melodrama, the kind of piece once parodied, I remember, by Ernita Lascelles. The truth is that Lucretia never sat at a deadly banqueting table pondering murder with the relish of a Hermione Gingold sketch. Rosemary Anne Sisson has sought now*

**Rosemary Anne Sisson's first play The Queen and the Welshman, appears in Plays of the Year (Volume 18).*

to interpret the woman, not to underscore the legend. It all comes out with uncommon power because, other things aside, the dramatist gets the essential quality of that strange, sultry world, like a magnificent bloodstained tapestry seen in thunder-light upon a palace wall: a world of civilised barbarity, of menace and high beauty; one of the sonnet and the sword, of noble art and often ignoble deed.

I met THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS in an exciting production at Pitlochry during the Festival of 1959. There, in the cup of the Perthshire Highlands, the dramatist found for her work the immense stage of the Festival Theatre that, if only 12 ft. in height, is actually wider than that of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. She filled it with a play ample in mind and treatment. Moreover, she had the fortune to have Jo Dua, the Belgian director, to keep the scene glitteringly alive, with the aid of Robert Weaver's sets of a free and flowing colour, rose and gold and white and green and tawny.

The Pitlochry Festival, an extraordinary enterprise, rose from the late John Stewart's single-minded faith in the theatre. His work is now carried on, as he would have wished it, by his associate from the first, Kenneth Ireland. There are few better ways of preparing for a night in the theatre than by wandering round the new Loch Faskally, or by a scramble over the slopes of Ben-y-Vrackie: add, as I did, THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS, and there is a quite astonishing week-end.

IV

A few pages back I wrote: "Lonsdale made his own Debrett." And some years ago I began an essay with the words:

Let us consider Dukes. Frederick Lonsdale has been considering them with amused interest for a long time, and he has been good enough to pass on his enjoyment to us. A Duke, in Lonsdale's opinion, is not the most valuable

member of society: he is merely an instrument for the manufacture of epigrams. . . . Sean O'Casey, in one of his last plays, says something to the purpose about "a silken glossified tall hat." Few dramatists talk through a glossified tall hat better than Lonsdale does. . . .

Back then, finally, to the late Frederick Lonsdale's typical comedy of manners, LET THEM EAT CAKE, complete with Duke (of Hampshire). This, done in New York during 1938 as Once Is Enough, when it was a play of the nineteen-twenties in the manner of The High Road, was back-dated in London production to 1913, the end of an era; whichever date is accepted, the text will interest collectors of Lonsdale. The plot is simple. Designing woman seeks Duke, Duchess baulks designing woman, Duke and Duchess in harmony again. But any student of the theatre must know how this confident dramatist could urge a play along, and here he is once more. A characteristic piece, though certainly not one for the younger nihilists. Students of stage history, consulting the files in the distant future, may chuckle at the contrast between two plays presented on successive nights in the West End during May 1959. The second of them was LET THEM EAT CAKE, very well interpreted at the Cambridge by a cast headed by Michael Denison and Dulcie Gray. Many must have wondered about the life of that gentle figure Lord Plynne as he was acted by Claude Hulbert. He reminded me of a moth, a very polite moth, that settled now and again on a convenient shrub, examined the landscape benignly, and flickered off with a courteous quivering of the wings to all.

J. C. TREWIN

Hampstead,
July, 1959.

THE GRASS IS
GREENER

by

HUGH *and* MARGARET WILLIAMS

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Anna Deere Wiman and Jack Minster presented *The Grass is Greener* at the St. Martin's Theatre, London, on December 2, 1958, with the following cast:

VICTOR	<i>Hugh Williams</i>
SELLARS	<i>Moray Watson</i>
HILARY	<i>Celia Johnson</i>
CHARLES	<i>Edward Underdown</i>
HATTIE	<i>Joan Greenwood</i>

Directed by Jack Minster
Designed by Hutchinson Scott

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

VICTOR
SELLARS
HILARY
CHARLES
HATTIE

SCENES

The action takes place in a house in Hampshire in the month of May.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1. *A Friday afternoon.*
SCENE 2. *A week later.*

ACT TWO

SCENE 1. *The following evening.*
SCENE 2. *Later that night.*

ACT ONE

Scene I

The curtain rises on a small, charming upstairs sitting room in the private wing of one of the stately homes of England. Through the long windows, which face the audience, can be seen the dark branches of a cedar tree.

There is a door on the right which leads to the parts of the house open to the public, and another on the left leading to the wing occupied by the family. There is a large flat writing table prominent on the left hand side of the room, bookshelves, comfortable sofas and armchairs, a drink table, and a beautiful fireplace. The general appearance and atmosphere of the room has probably not changed greatly in the last two hundred years.

Gay spring sunlight is pouring through the long windows. It is a beautiful little room, but also comfortable and rather cosy.

Victor is seated at the writing table doing his accounts. He is a nice-looking man, attractive, and dealing with middle age as he does with everything else—with skill and assurance.

The door to the public rooms is open and voices can be heard of people being shown round.

Victor rises and shuts the door. As he crosses back to the desk the telephone rings. He picks up the receiver.

VICTOR: Good afternoon. Yes it is. Oh, hullo, Vicar, how are you? Good. And Mrs. Jordan? Good. Yes, it's a lovely day, isn't it—real spring. I suppose you want to give me the Lessons for Sunday? Just a second, I'll jot it down. Deuteronomy Chapter 28, from the beginning—down to the fifteenth

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

verse. O.K., and the second? (*He continues writing.*) Matthew—yes—yes. That sounds a long one—you promised me no long ones. It isn't? I suppose I shall have to believe you. Is it all right if I drop the altar flowers in to you tomorrow morning? I won't cut 'em till then. Tell Mrs. Jordan I'm going to bring her round some tulips. See you then. Good-bye.

[*Enter Sellars the butler. Though dressed conventionally, his face is a little too intellectual for a butler, consequently his appearance is not so much disappointing as disarming. He seems a little out of character, which indeed he is.*]

SELLARS: Am I disturbing you, milord?

VICTOR: Yes, you are, Sellars.

SELLARS: I'm sorry, milord. (*He is not prepared to leave however.*)

VICTOR: You've made me forget what 143 half crowns are. Eights into 143—

SELLARS: I make it seventeen pounds seventeen and six. I wonder if I might have a word with you?

VICTOR (*pleased*): So do I. So we're probably right.

Not bad. Not bad at all, considering last Saturday wasn't a very nice day. Funny, the Saturday people don't buy the booklet, only fourteen copies, disappointing!

SELLARS: They're very good on teas, milord.

VICTOR: Yes, and more profit on teas than the booklet, so we mustn't grumble. I always feel a little hurt when they don't buy the booklet, I thought you and I wrote it rather well. Of course what we really want is a licence.

SELLARS: A wine and spirits licence, milord?

VICTOR: M'm. And beer of course. (*Starts to put piles of half crowns into a money bag.*)

THE GRASS IS GREENER

SELLARS: Wouldn't that attract the wrong sort of people?

VICTOR: If the riff-raff who parade through my house and gardens leaving nut shells and apple cores all over the place are the right kind, I'd just as soon have my privacy invaded by the other sort. The possible eventualities I incur through allowing the public into my house, makes me very jumpy.

SELLARS: In what way?

VICTOR: Supposing someone slid down the banisters and broke a hip. Anything could happen really.

SELLARS: I should have thought a licence would encourage that sort of thing, milord.

VICTOR: I dare say. It was only a thought. An attempt to be enterprising. I got the idea the other day when I passed a pub called "The Duke of Bedford". How much is fourteen one and sixes?

SELLARS: A guinea, milord.

VICTOR: How charming. Now I can't do my accounts with you standing there. What do you want?

SELLARS: I beg your pardon, milord, I came to ask if you'd finished with *The Times*.

VICTOR: Yes I think so, why?

SELLARS: Then would you mind if I took it now, milord?

VICTOR: What do you want *The Times* for—to light a fire? (*Looking up from his accounts.*) What do you want to light a fire for? Much too warm for a fire.

SELLARS: I want to read it.

VICTOR: Oh! yes of course—by all means. It's about somewhere.

[*He returns to his accounts.*]

SELLARS: Doesn't it strike you as a little odd, milord, that your butler should want to borrow *The Times* in

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

the middle of a Friday afternoon? When his day off is on Thursday I mean.

VICTOR: I hadn't really thought about it. Yes, I suppose it does. What's the matter—you bored?

SELLARS: To death, milord.

VICTOR: Why aren't you working?

SELLARS: I haven't any work to do.

VICTOR: How's that?

SELLARS: I've done the silver. I've nothing to do now until I serve your tea at four-thirty.

VICTOR: No, no, no, I didn't mean that sort of work, I meant your novel. Why aren't you working at that?

SELLARS: I'm stuck badly. I nearly tore the whole thing up last night.

VICTOR (*disengaging himself from his work for the first time*): Now you mustn't do that. What's the trouble?

SELLARS: Almost certainly the basic trouble is myself. I'm fundamentally happy and contented. That's bad enough of course, but on top of that I'm normal. That's fatal.

VICTOR: D'you mean you'd prefer to be unhappy and abnormal?

SELLARS: But of course! I want to be a success. And to be a success one must at least start off by being contemporary, which unfortunately I'm not. It means I've no feeling of insecurity or frustration—no despair.

VICTOR: And that's essential?

SELLARS: The first essential. And I feel perfectly contented, really rather blameless. And hardly resent anything at all.

VICTOR: Oh Lord. But you must have known all this when you chucked teaching to become a writer.

SELLARS: I don't think I did chuck it to become a

writer. Oh, don't misunderstand me, I want to write, but I don't think that was the real reason I gave up teaching.

VICTOR: Then you're here under false pretences. You answered my advertisement, and when I asked you what your qualifications were, you said you held a degree in science. Despite such a ludicrous recommendation I engaged you as my butler, partly because you said you wanted to write a novel, and you couldn't write after teaching all day, and partly because I remembered your father when he was a butler, and a very good one too, I always understood. Luckily it's turned out very well. I'd like to know what your reason was if it wasn't to write. Were you sick of teaching?

SELLARS: No. (*Pause.*) I began to disapprove of what I taught. I began to disapprove of science.

VICTOR: I beg your pardon?

SELLARS: I maintain that scientific progress has gone too far too quickly. As Bertrand Russell said "Science has outgrown wisdom." I felt—I felt—well simply I felt I couldn't go on teaching it any more. I tried for about a year, but it was no good. I was miserable. Perhaps disapprove is the wrong word.

VICTOR: Is distrust the right one?

SELLARS (*nodding*): Maybe it is.

VICTOR: Yes, I see.

SELLARS: But you're quite right, milord, I am here under false pretences, and it worries me—a great deal.

VICTOR: How d'you mean?

SELLARS: Well, milord, the point is I feel such a waste of money, I don't really think you should have a butler at all.

VICTOR: Oh, really.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

SELLARS: I don't mean to be impertinent, but——

VICTOR: Go on, in for a penny in for a pound.

SELLARS (*taking the plunge*): You see, milord, you're not contemporary either.

VICTOR: You mean I'm an antique?

SELLARS: No, milord, you're traditional.

VICTOR: Well, go on.

SELLARS: Ever since your family first lived in this house, they've always had butlers—in earlier times I suppose they called them stewards. From your point of view that's sufficient reason to have one now. But don't you see, milord, nowadays you don't need one. Really you don't. There's no work for me. Years ago when there were big families, and entertaining was part of the life of a great house, and the whole place was occupied, and it was open house to your friends and not just the public—then my job must have been fun, and very hard work. But today—today I've really nothing to do. And I—and I——

VICTOR (*who has been listening attentively*): What, Sellars?

SELLARS: I should feel much happier, if you'd either sack me or reduce my wages by three pounds a week. (*There is a pause.*) That's what I came in here to say, milord, not really to borrow *The Times*.

VICTOR (*after a pause*): Yes I see. What you're saying, in effect, is that I'm out of date, old fashioned, and clinging to a way of life that's had dry rot in it since 1938.

SELLARS: No, I didn't say that.

VICTOR: Well, you're wrong. You've never been so wrong in all your born days. And I'll tell you why you're wrong. This house and these lands may be mine in title, but I regard them as a small part of England that I hold in trust—in trust for the future, not for my son. I find that fascinating and stimu-

lating. There are treasures, and beauty, and history in this house, and I'm preserving them in the most modern, streamline, commercial way it's possible to do. The farm pays, the market garden pays, the hens pay, and her Ladyship's mushrooms pay.

SELLARS: Yes, I do see all that.

VICTOR: And the reason I employ you is because I know jolly well the two and sixpenny public are far more thrilled by catching a glimpse of a real live butler than they are by the Velasquez at the top of the staircase. In spite of what you may think to the contrary, I am, in fact, extremely contemporary, highly efficient, and very businesslike. And to prove it to you, I'll accept your offer and reduce your wages by three pounds a week as from next Monday.

[*Enter Hilary. She is younger than Victor, beautiful by any standards; she has remained soft and sweet and unspoiled and her husband, quite rightly, loves her very much.*]

And now I suggest you go and teach your grandmother to suck eggs.

HILARY: No he can't. I want Sellars to do something for me. (*To Sellars.*) Would you do the mushroom run for me? They're all ready packed now, but as long as you have them at the station by six-thirty.

SELLARS: Certainly, milady.

HILARY: And I think the van wants petrol, so watch out. Get five gallons at Pickards. My account, remember. It's getting towards the end of the month and I want to hot it up a bit.

SELLARS: . . . Very good, milady.

VICTOR (*stopping him*): Sellars, how many half crowns in three pounds?

SELLARS: About a bus load, milord.

[*Exit.*]

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

VICTOR (*laughing*): You know I like him more and more. He's that rare being—a man who obeys the dictates of his conscience.

HILARY: What are you talking about?

VICTOR: About what he and I were talking about.

HILARY: And what was that?

VICTOR: You could call it progress, I suppose.

HILARY: You know, I've been wondering——

VICTOR: What, my love?

HILARY: D'you think he liked teaching?

VICTOR: I think so, why?

HILARY: I wonder if he misses it.

VICTOR: He said he was bored just now. Maybe he does. What's all this leading up to?

HILARY: D'you think if I was terribly clever with him, he'd give Emma her lessons?

VICTOR: Give Emma her lessons! Have you gone out of your mind?

HILARY: Only from nine-thirty to twelve.

VICTOR: He's a butler not a governess.

HILARY: It would mean we needn't have a governess. Emma's no trouble now, I can manage her perfectly well. It's simply a question of her lessons.

VICTOR: You mean sack Miss Mathews?

HILARY: Yes.

VICTOR: Do you know something?

HILARY: What?

VICTOR: I adore you.

HILARY: Do you, my darling, I'm so glad.

VICTOR: And I think that's the most bloody marvellous idea you've ever had in your whole life.

HILARY: We'd have to give him a little something extra, I suppose.

VICTOR: We'll give him three pounds a week extra.

HILARY: Then you approve?

VICTOR: My dear girl, if we sack Miss Mathews and

sell the television we'd return to a civilised way of life. What a pity we can't sell Miss Mathews. (*He picks up A.B.C.*) When can she leave—let's look up a train.

HILARY: Yes, that's always fun.

VICTOR (*A sudden thought*): But d'you think he will?

HILARY: Sellars? If Emma and I work on him right he will. (*Pause.*) Darling.

VICTOR: What?

HILARY: I'm sorry, but I want to work on you too.

VICTOR: Very unlike you, to warn me.

HILARY: Don't be beastly.

VICTOR (*looking at her affectionately*): Beauty and the beastly.

HILARY: Thank you, darling, how good you are to me!

VICTOR: To you or for you?

HILARY: Both I'm happy to say.

VICTOR: Then you're lucky, aren't you?

HILARY: Very lucky.

VICTOR: What are you reading?

HILARY: I wanted to look something up.

VICTOR: What?

HILARY: Henley.

VICTOR: Why?

HILARY: Look out of the window and you'll know why. I always want to read it at this time of year. Here it is. (*Reads.*)

And it's O, the wild Spring and his chances
And dreams!

There's a lift in the blood——

O! this gracious, and thirsting, and aching
Unrest!

All life's at the bud,
And my heart, full of April, is breaking
My breast.

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

VICTOR (*who has never taken his eyes away from her, picks up calendar on his desk.*) It's May. The ninth. At least that's the date I shall put on your cheque.

HILARY: Who said anything about a cheque?

VICTOR: "This gracious, and thirsting, and aching unrest." That can only mean one thing, my darling. New clothes. (*Writing cheque.*)

HILARY: You are clever, aren't you?

VICTOR: On the contrary you're the one who's clever. Spring! It's a turbulent season. All the clatter of re-birth.

HILARY: New nests and young grass. Song birds rehearsing and green leaves sprouting yellow. It's powerful stuff, and rather overwhelming.

VICTOR: Why did the bullrush? Because the cow-slips out. Nature playing Mothers and Fathers.

HILARY: Then she should be more modest about it and keep it to herself. Why drag me in. It's not fair and I don't like it. I find it very disturbing.

VICTOR: I must warn you, my darling, the older you get the fiercer and more poignant the spring becomes.

HILARY: It's quite merciless, isn't it? One almost longs for the sanctuary of autumn.

VICTOR: Except for asparagus I couldn't agree with you more. (*Handing her the cheque.*) Here you are.

HILARY: No, I didn't mean that. I don't want a cheque from you, honestly I don't. I just wanted to ask you if I could spend some of my mushroom money.

VICTOR: I don't allow you to accept money from other mushrooms.

HILARY: You've put "with love" above your signature.

VICTOR: That's all right, I've initialled it.

HILARY: Don't go.

THE GRASS IS GREENER

VICTOR: I'm busy.

HILARY: I haven't thanked you yet.

VICTOR: You don't have to.

HILARY: Where are you going?

VICTOR: To kiss goodbye to Miss Mathews.

[Exits. Hilary smiles happily, puts the cheque in her pocket, and crosses to the window. She picks up the copy of Henley, starts to exit and is stopped by the telephone ringing.]

HILARY: Hullo! Yes. Oh, hullo, Margot, how are you? Fine thanks—yes, I'm sure she'd love to, on the twentieth, yes I think that's all right. Three-thirty—What? Oh no! Oh Lord, must it be fancy dress? Yes I know they love it, but God, it's a bore. Whatever Emma goes as there are always four others. No, no, no—I'll manage something. I might turn her bridesmaid's dress into Little Miss Muffet. That'll mean a spider. A conjuror—Oh my dear, she'll be thrilled. We'll see you then, if not before. How's Ronnie? Give him our love. Yes indeed, she'll be looking forward to it. Thank you so much. Goodbye. *(She puts down the receiver.)* Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye.

[She crosses to pick up her jacket, then crosses to exit, as the door leading to the public part of the house opens quietly and Charles enters. He is an attractive, charming and well-dressed American in his early forties. He has a camera slung over his shoulder, and carries in one hand his hat and a small booklet.]

CHARLES: I'm awful sorry. I guess I've intruded.

HILARY *(after a slight pause while she looks at him)*: Yes, you have, haven't you?

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

CHARLES: I was making the tour of the house and got kind of absorbed in this little book. I should have gone on down the corridor I guess, but I made a mistake and took the wrong turning.

HILARY: I don't call opening a door marked "Private" making a mistake. I call it trespassing.

CHARLES (*after a pause. They are summing each other up*): What are you going to do, prosecute me? If you are I shall defend the action, because there is no notice on this door saying Private.

HILARY: Oh yes there is. (*He opens the door a little wider to show her there is no notice on it.*) Oh, I beg your pardon.

CHARLES: I'm the one that's begging your pardon. For intruding, ma'am.

HILARY: Someone must have taken it down.

CHARLES: Yes, ma'am.

HILARY: And in England we only call the Queen ma'am.

CHARLES: In the United States we make up for having no Royalty by calling everybody ma'am.

HILARY (*his charm is working*): Now perhaps you'll be good enough to put it back.

CHARLES (*innocently*): Put what back?

HILARY: The notice you removed from the door. There it is on the floor.

CHARLES: Must have fallen down.

HILARY: Rubbish. You put it there.

CHARLES (*pinning the notice back*): Well, if I'd put it in my pocket I might have taken it away with me.

HILARY: The police would describe your actions as "entering with intent".

CHARLES (*smiling*): I guess I did enter with intent at that. Not to steal anything.

HILARY: I think I deserve an explanation.

CHARLES: It's quite simple really. I'm just naturally sort of bad at resisting temptation. I'd spent a wonderful hour going over your beautiful home——

HILARY: You mean house, don't you? You can't call a place a home when people only have to pay half a crown to walk all over it. And not content with seeing the public rooms you wanted to see the private ones as well. Is that it?

CHARLES: Let's say I was curious to see the people who live in them.

HILARY: Nowadays an Englishman's home is no longer his castle—it's his income. It's unfair of you to take advantage of it.

CHARLES: You're making me feel rather ashamed of myself.

HILARY: That's the price you must expect to pay if you give way to temptation.

CHARLES (*a little contrite*): I really am awful sorry. I don't know how to forgive myself.

HILARY: Surely I'm the person who has to forgive you?

CHARLES: Yes, ma'am. I'm sorry no, ma'am. No I don't mean—no ma'am, I just remembered not to say ma'am that's all. You've got me really worried.

HILARY: Well, don't worry any more.

CHARLES: Thank you.

[There is a pause while they look at each other. They do not realise it quite yet, but they are falling in love.]

You are Lady Rhyall, aren't you?

[Hilary nods.]

I'm very happy to know you.

HILARY: How d'you do.

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CHARLES: Yes, you sort of have to be don't you.

HILARY: Have to be what?

CHARLES: The Countess of Rhyall.

HILARY: Why?

CHARLES: You're the perfect type casting.

HILARY: Don't tell me you're in the film industry?

CHARLES: No, God forbid. I'm an oil man.

HILARY: Oh, you're a millionaire!

CHARLES (*nodding*): Yes, I am.

HILARY: Oh, well, won't you sit down?

CHARLES: Thank you. Why d'you take it so for granted I'm a millionaire?

HILARY: Nearly all the Americans I meet seem to be. Especially the oily ones.

CHARLES: I hoped you'd be impressed.

HILARY: As a matter of fact I am—just a little.

(*Pause.*) Have you been a millionaire quite some time?

CHARLES: I guess I have at that.

HILARY: Never resisting a temptation from one year's end to the other.

CHARLES: Is that how I seem to you?

HILARY: No, I can't honestly say it is. Why d'you think I'm type casting?

CHARLES (*choosing his words carefully*): Because you're cool—and elegant, and at ease and—and——

HILARY: And what?

CHARLES: And very lovely.

HILARY: I suppose the reason you're a millionaire is because you insist on value for money. You're certainly getting your half a crown's worth, aren't you?

CHARLES: I'm an American—I say what I think.

HILARY: And hesitate before you say it. A Frenchman would never have hesitated.

CHARLES: And an Englishman?

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HILARY: An Englishman would never have said it.

CHARLES: You mean an Englishman wouldn't tell a married woman she was lovely?

HILARY: Oh, no! I don't mean that. It's just that he usually tells the husband first.

CHARLES: What's the point of that?

HILARY: He knows the husband will repeat it to the wife. (*Imitating the English husband.*) "D'you know what old George said to me tonight, my dear? Said he thought you looked lovely."

CHARLES: I said very lovely.

HILARY: The wife's intrigued, and the next time she's alone with George she sees to it he tells her himself. It's an oblique approach, but not a bad one. It's effective, so I understand.

CHARLES: But I don't know your husband, and my name isn't George.

HILARY: What is it, Theodore or Harry or Ike? They're the only American names I know, I'm afraid. Oh, I was forgetting Bing. I do hope you're not Bing.

CHARLES: Charles. What's yours?

HILARY: Hilary.

CHARLES: Hilary. That's a boy's name. You don't look like a boy to me.

HILARY: And a term.

CHARLES: A term for what?

HILARY: The Lent term—at Oxford. Charles what?

CHARLES: Delacro. D-E-L-A-C-R-O.

HILARY: It sounds French.

CHARLES: It is. It's really Delacroix. C-R-O-I-X. But we're a simple straightforward people in the United States and when we see an X on the end of a name we pronounce it. My Grandfather thought Delacroix (*he pronounces the X*) sounded like a duck

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laying an egg, so he cut it off. The X I mean. He was born in France. Near Tours.

HILARY: Now isn't that odd! I had a French grandfather, and he lived in the Touraine. Perhaps we're cousins.

CHARLES: I doubt that. Your grandfather was probably a nobleman—mine was a clockmaker.

HILARY: Now you're a millionaire and I'm a mushroom grower. Well there you are! That's how the world wags.

[*Another silence, which she eventually breaks.*]

HILARY: It's too early to offer you a cup of tea, perhaps you'd like a drink?

CHARLES: I don't really want one, but if taking a drink off you means I'm now your guest and not just an intruder, then I certainly will.

HILARY: Let's just say it's because our grandfathers were compatriots. Will you help yourself?

CHARLES: Thank you.

HILARY: It's something you're quite accustomed to I imagine.

CHARLES: Helping myself?

[*She nods.*]

Is that a crack or a compliment?

HILARY: Which would you say it was?

CHARLES: In my country I'd say it was a compliment. In yours I guess it's a crack. And if you'll forgive my saying so, I think that's a pity. (*He is helping himself to a gin and tonic.*)

HILARY: I'm not in a position to argue, the relative value of mushrooms and oil in the world market being so unfairly what it is. And don't try and turn

the tables on me.

CHARLES: Why not?

HILARY: Because I don't like it.

CHARLES: Because you're not accustomed to it?

HILARY: No, I'm not.

CHARLES: Then I apologise. Some of your English customs I find more unusual than others. Having no ice in my drinks, of course, I'm quite used to.

HILARY: Damn! I'm most awfully sorry. (*Moving towards the bell.*) I'll get some in two minutes.

CHARLES: No. Please, really I don't want any. I never complain unless it actually burns my tongue. Can I fix you a drink?

HILARY: Fix! Sounds as if you were going to drug me.

CHARLES: Sometimes I think the greatest barrier between our two countries is the bond of a common language. Can I pour you out a drink?

HILARY: No thank you.

CHARLES: My French is pretty limited too, but I believe I get on better over there than I can here. Tell me, why do you grow mushrooms—to make omelettes?

HILARY: To make money.

CHARLES: And do you?

HILARY: Oh yes. It's rather fun, isn't it. Making money I mean.

CHARLES: Not for me it wasn't. I had to work too hard. I'm having my fun now.

HILARY: And what fun d'you have?

CHARLES: I travel. I fish. I've just had a week's fishing now, with a friend of mine who has a beat on the Hampshire Avon. I was driving back to London when I remembered Lynley Hall was on the way.

HILARY: What else?

CHARLES: What else? I guess I try to understand

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what I see, and grasp what I listen to. I watch the world bumping along and try to make some sense of it. Very small sections of it I try to help. I like to sail. I like to play bridge. I'm a Balletomane, and I enjoy the theatre. I try to make a reasonable pattern out of my life, and not let it be just a crazy mixed up doodle.

HILARY: And ever since you read Churchill's little book about it, you've been trying to paint.

CHARLES: Well, what d'you know! That's absolutely right.

HILARY: And where do you live?

CHARLES: I have a home in Long Island, but I'm only there a couple of months a year.

HILARY: There you go again, calling a house a home. It can't be much of a home if you're only there two months out of the twelve.

CHARLES: I guess you're right.

HILARY: And you're divorced. (*There is no question mark to this.*)

CHARLES: Yes, I am. My wife and I divorced three years ago. Maybe if we hadn't I'd have a home and not just a house. Why were you so sure I was divorced?

HILARY: You're the perfect type casting.

[*They laugh, and then another silence captures their conversation.*]

And I bet you go to a psychiatrist, and take tranquilisers, and are frightened of ulcers—and eat too many salads.

CHARLES: Lady Rhyall's report on the social activities of the American male.

HILARY: You subscribe to the *Reader's Digest*, belong to the Racquets Club, and worked your way

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through college. Or did you get a football scholarship?

CHARLES: No, I worked my way through college. As a crooner, believe it or not.

HILARY: And played half back on the football team.

CHARLES: Correct.

HILARY: And were in the Marines during the war.

CHARLES: Army Air Force.

HILARY: And finished up a Colonel.

CHARLES: Wrong again. A one-star General. Anything else?

HILARY: You call your girl friends either Honey or Sugar.

CHARLES: Isn't it my turn to be rude to you now?

HILARY: And if you hadn't got a camera slung round you you wouldn't feel properly dressed.

CHARLES: Like a Britisher wears his umbrella?

HILARY: That's our climate.

CHARLES: D'you mean they're actually constructed to unroll? I thought they were just for hailing taxis.

HILARY: We unroll them watching cricket, and at most weddings. All right, I'll be fair. You can have your turn now. Being rude to me I mean.

[Charles is looking at her and absorbed in what he sees.]

Well go on. Begin.

CHARLES: Well, now, let me see. I'd say you were an only child and were very spoilt, and you were called Hilary because your mother and father were disappointed you weren't a boy.

HILARY: I have three brothers.

CHARLES: Ah well, they spoilt you.

HILARY: They bullied me, teased me, tricked me out of my pocket money, cut my head open and destroyed

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my belief in Father Christmas. And I simple adored them. I was called Hilary after someone my father hoped would leave me something in his will, but he never did.

CHARLES: You wore a brace on your teeth and were always considered the ugly duckling.

[*She nods.*]

And then turned out the Deb. of the year.

HILARY: You're doing quite nicely, aren't you? You must be in practice.

CHARLES: No, this is your game. I've never played before. Were you the Deb. of the year?

HILARY: No.

CHARLES: Anyway that didn't bother you because all you really wanted was to go up to Oxford.

HILARY: Cambridge.

CHARLES: Forgive me. Of course Cambridge. A light blue stocking, and much more attractive. You majored History, and can finish *The Times* crossword over your breakfast.

HILARY: Yes and no.

CHARLES: What d'you mean, yes and no?

HILARY: I mean yes, I read History at Cambridge, and no, I read the *Daily Herald* at breakfast.

CHARLES: Don't tell me you're a Socialist!

HILARY: I think really I'm an Anarchist.

CHARLES: That's quite an up and coming party too, I believe.

HILARY: I don't know about that, but a lot of my friends won't allow their children to burn Guy Fawkes on a bonfire any more.

CHARLES: Quite right. He was a romantic.

HILARY: Or maybe he was a realist.

CHARLES: Which are you?

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HILARY: Me? I'm just a housewife, I suppose I'm a realist.

[*Charles shakes his head.*]

Why d'you shake your head?

CHARLES: Because I don't agree. Not from the evidence I have before me——

HILARY: What evidence d'you have before you?

CHARLES: Your eyes. Star witnesses you might call them.

HILARY: That's very prettily said. I thought you were going to be rude to me.

CHARLES: A rip-roaring grade A romantic. Do you often come up to London?

HILARY: About once a week.

CHARLES: Will you have lunch with me?

HILARY: No thank you.

CHARLES: Why not?

HILARY: I have a sandwich at my hairdresser's.

CHARLES: What sort of sandwiches d'you like?

HILARY: Smoked salmon.

CHARLES: If I brought some to your hairdresser's could we have a picnic?

HILARY: No.

CHARLES: What do you do when you leave your hairdresser's?

HILARY: I drive home.

CHARLES: Have tea with me first.

HILARY: No.

CHARLES: Why not?

HILARY: I don't think I want to.

CHARLES: I don't think I believe you.

HILARY: You're very confident.

CHARLES: Courageous maybe, not confident.

HILARY: By rights you should be in the West Corri-

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dor now, enjoying the "Portrait of a Burgomeister" by Van Dyck. "Lady Rhyall and children" by Nasmyth *circa* 1800 unfinished. "Henrietta Maria, wife of Charles the First" by Rawlinson, and a pair of mirrors by Robert Adam. Why don't you go and look at them?

CHARLES: I prefer looking at you.

HILARY: I'm not on exhibition.

CHARLES: Do you mind if I take your picture? The portrait of a lady of fashion *circa* 1960.

HILARY: That's not fair, I've been packing mushrooms.

CHARLES (*he begins to prepare his camera, and takes a light meter from his pocket*): Or shall we call it just Hilary?

HILARY: I think "Subject unknown".

[*Without waiting for her to consent, he begins taking pictures. He is quite evidently expert.*]

CHARLES (*after one picture*): You see, I shall want proof later on, that the last twenty minutes really have happened. I may lie to myself and pretend they haven't. This picture will prove I'm wrong. That I really have seen you and talked to you.

HILARY: What d'you mean?

CHARLES: You know exactly what I mean.

HILARY: No I don't.

CHARLES: They say the camera cannot lie. Nor can you it seems. Not very well anyway. Merely to avoid the truth isn't good enough. Maybe I'm not going to say this very well, but I'm going to say it because I have to say it.

HILARY: No—please no.

CHARLES: Why not? Are you frightened?

HILARY: Yes I am.

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CHARLES: Why, my darling?

HILARY: Don't call me that.

CHARLES: Because it's so sudden. Is that why?

HILARY: Not only that.

CHARLES: Would you have believed it could happen like this?

HILARY: I've heard of it.

CHARLES: I've heard of it, but I don't think I believed it.

HILARY: There ought to be some sort of warning, so that you can run away. There wasn't any.

CHARLES (*after a pause*): I've a confession to make. Why I came through that door I mean. I'd been listening to you talking on the telephone.

HILARY: Eavesdropping!

CHARLES: No, listening to your voice. I thought it such a lovely voice, I opened the door. Then I saw you and you were lovely too.

HILARY: Just a simple thing like a man coming through a door. And now look what's happened. It's like that game. He said to her. She said to him. And the consequences were.

CHARLES: What are the consequences?

HILARY: None.

CHARLES: I'm staying at Claridge's. Will you call me?

HILARY: No.

CHARLES: Please.

HILARY: No.

CHARLES: I shall stay in all the time in case you change your mind.

HILARY: I shan't.

CHARLES: Women do sometimes. I shall hope. For two weeks I shall hope.

HILARY (*she puts her hand in her pocket and takes out a coin*): Here's your half crown back. Now go home

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to America. (*He takes it, looks at it.*) And there's no fountain here for you to throw it in.

CHARLES: I shall keep it always.

HILARY: It's not the first time American money has been a nuisance in this country.

CHARLES: That's a little ungrateful, isn't it?

HILARY (*suddenly emotional*): I don't give a damn what it is.

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her. When the kiss ends they are both silent, and she is trembling.*]

You must go. Go along the corridor until you come to the head of the staircase. At the bottom of the stairs turn right, that'll take you out to the Car Park.

CHARLES: Goodbye—Hilary.

HILARY (*too brightly*): It's been nice knowing you, Mr. Delacro.

CHARLES: Say goodbye nicely.

HILARY (*slowly*): Goodbye, Charles.

CHARLES: Goodbye—my love.

HILARY (*shaking her head as she looks at him*): I'm not your love.

CHARLES: Perhaps it's not goodbye either. (*Moving towards her.*) Don't move. I want one more picture of you—as you are now. Don't move.

[*He takes the photograph as Victor enters.*]

VICTOR: Darling, d'you know where my bible is? Oh, sorry, I thought you were alone.

HILARY: Isn't it by your bed?

VICTOR: No. I wanted to read through the lessons before Sunday, and I've searched high and low. It's really maddening. Perhaps Sellars knows where it is. (*Turning to Charles.*) You're from the Press are you?

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CHARLES: No. No, I'm not.

VICTOR: But you've got a camera. And you were taking a photograph.

HILARY: Mr. Delacro is an American.

VICTOR (*enlightened*): Oh, I see. I thought you were from *Good Housekeeping* or something.

HILARY: As you've probably already gathered, Mr. Delacro, this is my husband.

CHARLES (*holding out his hand*): I'm very happy to know you, sir.

VICTOR (*shaking hands*): How d'you do.

[*There is a slight pause as Victor looks at first one then the other. He knows exactly what has happened.*]

It's quite absurd, isn't it. Two complete strangers meet—one pretends it's made him happy and the other replies by inquiring how he does.

HILARY (*making a brave effort*): I believe in Romany the gypsy greeting is "We have come to discuss the affairs of Egypt".

VICTOR: As Mr. Delacro is an American surely we can think of something less embarrassing than that.

CHARLES: What's wrong with hulloo?

VICTOR: What indeed. It's non-committal. Hulloo. (*Holds out his hand.*)

CHARLES (*shaking hands again*): Hulloo.

VICTOR: A little telephonic perhaps.

[*Enter Sellars.*]

SELLARS: You rang, milord?

VICTOR: Oh yes, Sellars, I did. (*To Charles*) I must ring off now I'm afraid. Have you seen my bible anywhere, Sellars?

SELLARS: Oh dear, I'm more than sorry, milord—I

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really am. I'm afraid I've got it, I wanted to look something up.

VICTOR: First you borrow my *Times* and now you pinch my bible. This is Democracy running amok.

SELLARS: I'm very sorry indeed, milord. I'll put it back beside your bed.

VICTOR: Anyway you should have a bible of your own.

SELLARS: The one you're using is mine, milord. (*Exits.*)

VICTOR (*laughing*): Now why are we all standing about. (*To Charles.*) Do sit down. Tell me, are you a very keen photographer?

CHARLES: I get a lot of fun out of it.

VICTOR: I bet you've got some beauties of the sentries outside Buckingham Palace.

CHARLES (*laughing*): As a matter of fact I have. In colour too.

VICTOR: Was that one you took just now in colour?

CHARLES: Yes, it was.

VICTOR: You must let me have one if it comes out.

HILARY: Don't be so old fashioned, Victor. Nowadays all photographs "come out" as you call it. You're still living in the world of the Brownie.

VICTOR: Well, the last photograph I took was taken with a Brownie I've had since I was twelve, and that was published. I got ten and sixpence.

CHARLES: Is that so?

VICTOR: A couple of years ago. One of the Sunday picture papers published it. *The Field* turned it down. Never could understand why.

CHARLES: What was the subject?

VICTOR (*there is not a word of truth in any of this*): It was a grey squirrel with two heads and two tails. Most extraordinary sight. They're a fearful pest the grey squirrel, but d'you know I couldn't bring myself to

shoot this one. Not after I'd taken its picture. Hilary here accused me of sentimentality, but there it was, I simply hadn't the heart.

HILARY: What on earth do you think you're talking about?

VICTOR: About that grey squirrel, darling.

HILARY: I've never heard of a grey squirrel with two heads and two tails in the whole of my life.

VICTOR: Yes, you have, darling. Of course you have. We must try and keep this door shut. Anyone might come in. The Autumn before last, you remember. And when I let him go you said "Well, that's one squirrel that's proved two heads are better than one". And then I said "Well, it's heads he wins anyway".

[*She gives him a withering look.*]

Are you over here for some time, Mr. Delacro?
(*Offering empty cigarette box.*)

CHARLES: I'll be in Europe all summer I hope.

VICTOR: Oh, I'm so sorry, there aren't any. Are you staying near here, or are you making a quick tour of all the Stately Homes? There are four hundred of them now, half-a-crown ones I mean.

CHARLES: Are there really?

VICTOR: Go on, I've got some more. (*Offering packet with one cigarette in it.*)

CHARLES: No, thank you, I don't smoke.

VICTOR: So that would take you the best part of the summer, wouldn't it? If you plan to see them all. Did you buy the booklet?

CHARLES (*indicating it*): Yes, I did.

VICTOR: Good. It's rather well done, don't you think?

HILARY: Mr. Delacro has just had a week's fishing and is on his way back to London.

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VICTOR: Oh really—where've you been?

CHARLES: A friend of mine has a beat on the Hampshire Avon.

VICTOR: Whereabouts?

CHARLES: Fordingbridge. Quite near Salisbury.

VICTOR: Josh Peters?

CHARLES: That's right.

VICTOR: I've known Josh all my life. Since I was eight anyway. We had chicken-pox together.

HILARY: That must be a very wonderful bond between you.

VICTOR: How is he?

CHARLES: Very well. Put on a little weight since I saw him last maybe.

VICTOR: Took too much exercise when he was young. Well, you had good weather—how was the fishing?

CHARLES: On the whole very fair. A bit too much weed, and not enough cover on the banks yet. You couldn't really stalk a fish. But there were one or two big ones about. Josh did better than I did I'm afraid.

VICTOR: So he damn well should, he knows that water as well as he knows his wife. Much prefers it too.

HILARY: Don't be vulgar, Victor.

VICTOR: Perfectly true, my dear. And who could blame him? She stands six foot in her stocking feet, and there's always been a certain amount of doubt that she could read and write. You ought to have been there towards the end of the month when the Mayfly hatch. Best couple of weeks of the whole season.

CHARLES: Josh did ask me, so maybe I will.

VICTOR: Very good article on the Mayfly in last week's *Angling Times*. Did you see it?

CHARLES: No, I didn't.

VICTOR: I'll get it for you. Now where the hell is

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it? I suppose Sellars has got it. Look here, why don't you stay and have a cup of tea with us?

CHARLES: That's very kind of you——

VICTOR: Is there any of that Dundee cake left?

HILARY: I think so.

VICTOR: Then you must stay. It's simply delicious. D'you like Dundee cake?

CHARLES: Very much.

VICTOR: What could be better. Then after tea we'll take you round the gardens. Now I'll get that *Angling Times* for you.

CHARLES: Don't bother.

VICTOR: It's no bother. I wonder if I can find the photograph of that squirrel—I'd like you to see it. You don't happen to know where it is, do you, darling?

[*Exits. There is a silence. Charles watches her.*]

HILARY: He's not always as facetious as that.

CHARLES: D'you reckon he knows what's happened?

HILARY: Oh, yes, he knew, he knew at once.

CHARLES: That's my fault, I'm afraid. You can control yourself, but not the excitement inside you generating something into the atmosphere.

HILARY: No, not through you. Through me. (*Catching sight of the booklet he is still holding.*) Turn to the last page of that little booklet and read the last sentence.

CHARLES (*having found the place*): "The present Earl and Countess were married in 1946. They have a son and heir, Lord Wragley, aged eleven, and a daughter, The Lady Emma Pooley, aged seven."

HILARY (*after a pause*): And we've been very happy.

Curtain

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

Scene 2

A week later.

Victor enters, reading Henley. He stands at his desk looking intently at the telephone. He puts his hand on the receiver as if to lift it, decides not to and moves to the window. He looks out for a moment or two, then goes to the bell and rings it, then to the drink table where he pours out a whiskey and water. A cuckoo can be heard calling incessantly.

Sellars enters.

SELLARS: You rang, milord?

VICTOR: Will you take those bloody mushrooms to the station, Sellars, they're all packed.

SELLARS: Yes, milord.

VICTOR: And tell Mrs. Bagshott if she ever gives me one to eat again, I'll sack her.

SELLARS: Very good, milord.

VICTOR (*sniffing his fingers*): Damn things, I've just scrubbed my hands and I can still smell them.

SELLARS: I believe her Ladyship wears gloves, milord. Will she be returning this evening?

VICTOR: I don't think so, Sellars. I'll dine up here on a tray. (*By the window, listening.*) God, what a maddening bird that is.

SELLARS: It's a popular expression, isn't it, milord—he's gone cuckoo.

VICTOR: Who's gone cuckoo?

SELLARS: No one, milord. You said it was a maddening bird. I imagine that's how the expression originated. Shall I close the windows? That might muffle it a little.

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VICTOR: That's admitting defeat. No thank you.

SELLARS: His call always sounds like a sort of *crie de coeur* to me, milord.

VICTOR: Why's that?

SELLARS: Well, we all look forward so much to him, and he gets such a wonderful welcome when he first arrives—articles about him and letters in *The Times* and so on, and from then on everybody simply hates him. Having a failure after a good "Press" must be very discouraging. Perhaps I'm looking at it more from the novelist's point of view, milord.

VICTOR: What's the time?

SELLARS: About a quarter to six.

VICTOR: Then you'd better buck up.

SELLARS: Yes, milord. (*Moving to door.*)

VICTOR: Bring the evening papers from the station, will you?

SELLARS: Very good, milord. (*Exits.*)

[*Victor exits to put Henley away as Hattie enters through the door leading to the public rooms. She is pretty, witty, gay, chic and sometimes a little outrageous. She puts her bag on chaise longue as Victor re-enters.*]

VICTOR: Hullo, Hattie. What are you doing here?

HATTIE: Hullo, darling. How are you?

VICTOR: Splendid, thanks. How are you? (*Crosses and kisses her.*)

HATTIE: Never better. Pleased to see me?

VICTOR: Not very.

HATTIE: Surprised to see me?

VICTOR: Not very.

HATTIE: Oh, and I paid half a crown to come in that way specially.

VICTOR: No you didn't.

HATTIE: I call it a swindle. What d'you mean I didn't?

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

VICTOR: You came in that way because you knew a week ago today someone else came in that way, and you thought what fun it would be to do the same.

HATTIE: Darling, I love you more and more every time I see you. But you're only half right. If I'd come in the normal way you might have told Sellars to say you'd gone out, or abroad or something. Such a pity—our love for each other is founded on mutual distrust.

VICTOR (*laughing*): What led you to suppose I love you?

HATTIE: You did. Once upon a time. I think you even put it in writing.

VICTOR: I suppose you'd like a drink?

HATTIE: I'd like some champagne, please.

VICTOR: I haven't any champagne. And I doubt very much if I'd give it you if I had.

HATTIE: I know how you must be feeling, darling, but you mustn't get bitter.

VICTOR: Whisky or gin? Or there's some cooking sherry in the kitchen.

HATTIE: Gin, please.

VICTOR: Tonic, soda, ginger ale or water?

HATTIE: Pink—and d'you mind burning the angostura, please?

VICTOR: I haven't any matches.

HATTIE (*finding book matches in her bag, and gives them to him*): Here you are.

VICTOR (*looking at them*): Claridges. You been there recently?

HATTIE: Not recently, no.

VICTOR: I expect you got them from Hilary.

HATTIE: I expect I did.

VICTOR: Have you seen much of her? (*Burning the angostura into a little blue flame.*)

HATTIE: Considering she's been staying with me, not

very much—no. I had the other half of a grapefruit with her yesterday morning. I expect she'd have sent you her love, but she didn't know I was coming down. D'you know it only took me an hour and twenty minutes door to door.

VICTOR: On your broomstick.

HATTIE: She was looking very pretty but rather tired I thought, I wondered if she needed a change.

VICTOR: How can people talk about progress? We used to burn women like you, now we have to be content with angostura. How much water?

HATTIE: "Water, water, quench fire," thank you, darling. (*Smiling sweetly.*) You can see I'm making allowances for you, can't you?

VICTOR (*handing her glass*): Here you are.

HATTIE (*raising her glass*): Well, good luck!

VICTOR: You say that as though you think I'm going to need it.

HATTIE: Don't we all? You can't do anything without good luck. You need it from the moment you get out of bed in the morning to the moment you get back in again at night. (*With disgraceful immodesty.*) Particularly when you get back in again at night.

VICTOR: You're a wanton.

HATTIE (*nodding*): Oh, but of course. But I mean, you get out of bed in the morning and turn on your bath, then the telephone rings and you forget all about the bath and flood the flat below. It's going to cost me ninety pounds. If I'd had any luck, either the telephone wouldn't have rung or it might have been the day they clean the boiler, and there wouldn't have been any water coming out of the tap. Everything's luck, and you can't do a damn thing without it. Look at the lousy luck I had the day I introduced you to Hilary at Windsor races. Won the Tote Daily Double and lost you. And if you'd married me and

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

not Hilary, then I wouldn't have married that horrid little man I did marry. Or spent all that money divorcing him. Wasn't much of a Tote Double either.

VICTOR: I suppose you blame me for that too.

HATTIE: I'm not blaming you for anything, darling. I was simply explaining how one always needs luck—even with bath water.

VICTOR: Why've you come down here?

HATTIE: Two reasons.

VICTOR: What are they?

HATTIE: Firstly, I'm very fond of Hilary.

VICTOR: And secondly?

HATTIE: I'm very fond of you.

VICTOR: So what?

HATTIE: I thought you might need cheering up, my sweet.

VICTOR: Now Hattie, be honest, what was the real reason?

HATTIE: I do hate it when people say "be honest". It puts one at such a disadvantage. And you must know as well as I do—that saying it to me is sheer waste of breath.

VICTOR: It was curiosity, wasn't it? You wanted to see how I'd reacted to my wife falling in love with another man.

HATTIE: He's not "just another man", darling, he's a millionaire.

VICTOR (*ignoring this*): Well, I'll tell you how I've reacted, I'm very annoyed. Very annoyed, very miserable, very at a loss, and very lonely.

HATTIE: And very jealous?

VICTOR: And very jealous. I don't like seeing that look on her face except when she's looking at me. But she wasn't looking at me, she was looking at him. That was on Friday. All day Saturday and Sunday I waited for her to say she was going to London for a

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few days, and on Monday morning she did. A very depressing and rather jumpy week-end.

HATTIE: Did you try to stop her?

VICTOR: I looked up a train for her, helped her pack, and drove her to the station.

HATTIE: Yes, she told me. Why didn't you try to stop her?

VICTOR: Because I'm not a fool.

HATTIE: I must confess I've never thought you were before. Wouldn't it have been safer if she hadn't seen him again?

VICTOR: From my point of view it was essential that she did see him again. If she hadn't I should have been the obstacle preventing her from seeing him. That would have damaged our relationship, even at the risk of encouraging theirs, that's the last thing I want to do. Anyway I doubt if I could have stopped her.

HATTIE: I don't want to be a wet blanket, darling, but isn't your relationship damaged already?

VICTOR: I hope not permanently, and not necessarily beyond repair. It all depends.

HATTIE: On what?

VICTOR: On me, on Hilary. And Mr. Delacro.

HATTIE: That name is going to crop up a lot in the conversation. Don't you think we ought to call him Charles?

VICTOR: Is that usual?

HATTIE: Oh, nowadays surely it must be.

VICTOR: Have you met him?

HATTIE: I haven't met an un-married millionaire for years. I'd be so over excited if I did I'd probably curtsy.

VICTOR: Did Hilary talk to you about him?

HATTIE: All the time—except when she talked about you.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

VICTOR: What did she say?

HATTIE: She said she loved you.

VICTOR: And was in love with him.

HATTIE: Mad about him.

VICTOR: There's a difference isn't there. (*Furiously.*) I've always known no good would come of my opening this house to the public. Has she been with him all the time?

HATTIE: I imagine so. They went to Kew Gardens yesterday, on a bus. I thought that was rather a bad sign.

VICTOR: Now what?

HATTIE: From what she said, they kiss goodbye and she comes home tomorrow.

VICTOR: And what am I supposed to do?

HATTIE: Thank your lucky stars.

VICTOR: That she's coming back?

HATTIE: Yes.

VICTOR: You think there was ever a danger she might not have come back?

HATTIE (*sbrugs her shoulders*): Not really, I suppose. But you must admit that Charles is obviously competition, and of course he's doing his damndest.

VICTOR: I'm sure he is.

HATTIE: And as I say, she's simply mad about him.

VICTOR: So I saw for myself. And he's trying to persuade her to leave me and marry him?

HATTIE: Oh yes, so I gathered.

VICTOR (*furiously*): No time wasted, eh? The Cafeteria system. See something you want, put it on a tray and take it away with you. It's quite astonishing, isn't it. Here's a man. A reasonable, decent sort of man, who'd no more dream of pinching my cuff links than he would of poaching my salmon. Yet he'll pay half a crown at the gate, walk into my house,

and without disturbing his conscience in any way, calmly endeavour to steal my wife.

HATTIE: By the same token Hilary wouldn't cheat at cards. There's no honour where there's sex I'm happy to say. (*Holding out her glass.*) If you'll give me some gin, I'll give you some advice, I don't believe in something for nothing.

VICTOR: D'you want all that bonfire business again?

HATTIE: Yes please.

VICTOR: What a nuisance you are. (*Begins the laborious business with a clean glass.*) Well, go on—go on—go on. Advise me.

HATTIE: Like most men who've had success with women, you flatter yourself you understand them. Don't be a mug, my sweet, you haven't a clue. Hilary's paramount emotion at the—I say, what a lovely word "paramount". I don't think I've ever used it before. Hilary's paramount emotion at the moment is neither her passion for Charles nor her love for you, it's a feeling of complete bewilderment that her values, her standards, her whole existence can be knocked cock-eyed in half an hour. When she comes home just remember that. And forget everything else.

VICTOR: And clap hands and jump for joy.

HATTIE: If you want her back, that's the way to play it.

[*The cuckoo has been calling again.*]

That bird is a little too emphatic, isn't he? What did Shakespeare say? "a cuckoo then on every tree, mocks married men".

[*Victor is at the window, his back to the audience. He turns to Hattie.*]

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

VICTOR: Supposing I can't play it that way?

HATTIE: Because of your pride?

VICTOR: Well, what's wrong with pride?

HATTIE: It comes before a fall, they say.

VICTOR: Nonsense, it's a very good thing. Been a great help to me all my life.

HATTIE: How?

VICTOR: Oh, not crying on Victoria platform.

HATTIE: You're going back a bit, aren't you?

VICTOR: Well—being jolly when you lose, being hearty at the dentist. Anyway, it's nothing to do with pride. It's because I love her. I've loved her for thirteen years, and each one of them I've loved her more.

HATTIE: Have you been faithful to her all those years?

VICTOR: Yes, I have. (*Catching her eye and realising the hopelessness of denial.*) Well, that's beside the point.

HATTIE: It's not beside the point, it is the point. A sharpish one, too. What's sauce for the goose. Remember?

VICTOR (*loudly*): Rubbish. The whole fundamental difference between men and women is that what's sauce for the goose is not sauce for the gander—that's why women wear wedding rings and men don't.

HATTIE: First proud, now arrogant.

VICTOR: Well, it's true!

HATTIE (*as if to a child*): Silly, headstrong boy.

VICTOR: Anyway the fact remains—the solemn fact remains, that my world goes round only because of her. She's the focus point of my whole existence. Everything I've done or accomplished, which doesn't amount to much I dare say, has either been for her or on account of her. We've been friends as well as lovers. And if I sing in my bath it's because I'm going to have breakfast with her. Without her I

don't say I'd be lost, but I certainly wouldn't be very clear in my mind quite which way to turn.

HATTIE: Tell her all that. Talk the whole thing over.

VICTOR: Fatal. The spoken word—like the sped arrow and the lost opportunity—it doesn't come back. When a situation like this is admitted out loud it means it's accepted. If it's accepted it's got to be discussed. And each time you discuss it you get further apart, until in the end you're so far away from each other you have to shout, and the whole thing becomes hopeless. She knows that as well as I do.

HATTIE: Then do as I say, just be gentle and kind and understanding.

VICTOR: Like a husband treats his bride on the honeymoon? She's not my bride she's my wife! And it's all too apparent this isn't our honeymoon. No, what I've got to do is to get Mr. Bloody Delacro out of her heart, out of her mind, and out of the God-damned country.

HATTIE: And how d'you propose to do that?

VICTOR: I don't know, I wish I did. All I know is, that she'll turn up here tomorrow as brave as a lion, as bright as a button, with her suitcase in one hand and her sacrifice in the other—and she'll be coming back, not because of me, but because of the children. Well, as far as I'm concerned, that's the wrong reason. I want her back simply and solely because of me.

HATTIE: Or not at all?

VICTOR: I think probably yes. Or not at all.

HATTIE: That's selfish and short-sighted and very stupid.

VICTOR: Selfish, maybe. Not the other two. I know my limitations, I couldn't live with Hilary watching her longing for somebody else. Forty-eight hours of that last week-end was enough, thank you. I couldn't face the humiliation of the dressing room. I

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

couldn't stand the polite, patched up, second best, forlorn sort of life. Patiently waiting the dawn of indifference. Not for me, Hattie, thank you very much, not for me. The role of forgiving husband is always a difficult one in triangular dramas, I should find it utterly beyond me. Far better not to attempt it. Anyway there's another possibility.

HATTIE: What's that?

VICTOR: That she'd fail. She might come back here, eat her heart out for a while and then run off. The well-known little note, that she couldn't stand it any longer—and an air line ticket to Romantic Places and Mr. Delacro. There's no guarantee that wouldn't happen.

HATTIE: Then you'd marry me at last and we'd live happily ever after.

VICTOR: No, if I'm going to preserve our marriage, and I don't mean a patched up bargain for the sake of the children, then something's got to be done—and done immediately.

HATTIE: If Hilary's prepared to make a sacrifice for the children, then I think you should too.

VICTOR: It's not that I wouldn't, it's quite simply that I couldn't. The only way to make a sacrifice is to enjoy it enormously. Wallow and slosh about in it. I'm not the type. I should bungle it hopelessly.

HATTIE: You may encounter opposition. Hilary may not like having her sacrifice flung back in her teeth.

VICTOR: How d'you mean?

HATTIE: She seemed to me pretty determined on coming home and continuing to be the good little wife and perfect mother.

VICTOR: With the aching heart?

HATTIE: Yes, but he's given her a mink coat, which should stop the ache a bit.

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VICTOR: He's done what?

HATTIE: He's given her a mink coat.

VICTOR: Has he, by God! Well, damn him and blast him, and I hope he rots in hell.

HATTIE: A wild mink. An absolute beauty.

VICTOR: And how is the good little wife and the perfect mother going to explain that away?

HATTIE: Poor sweet, she was rather worried about it. (*Very cheerfully.*) But I expect she'll think of something.

VICTOR (*quietly*): I've been wanting to give her a mink ever since we were married, and next Christmas I could just about have done it. I've a damn good mind to shoot him.

HATTIE: I think we should try and avoid bloodshed, darling.

VICTOR: Give me one good reason why.

HATTIE: It's a little old fashioned.

VICTOR: Then it's high time it was brought up to date. I don't like the ways of the modern world, and in particular the ways of the New World where Mr. Delacro comes from. If a man takes a fancy to a married woman, he gives her a mink coat and expects the husband to give her a divorce, which is just about as quick—and no harder to get than a cup of instant coffee.

HATTIE: We have that sort of thing over here as well you know.

VICTOR (*moving to telephone*): Of course we do. We have Coca Cola too, and where did it come from? How damn well dare she imagine she can come back here flaunting a mink coat in my face, and pretending she's paid for it out money she's won off Littlewoods. My God, she's got a gall.

HATTIE: Well, you couldn't expect her not to take it, could you, darling. Not wild mink. Now could you

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

—I mean apart from it being insured for three thousand pounds——

VICTOR: Three thousand pounds!

HATTIE: Three thousand pounds. I expect it's got a sentimental value as well.

VICTOR: Mayfair 8860, please.

HATTIE: That's Claridge's number.

VICTOR (*his manner and mood entirely changed*): Easy one to remember, isn't it?

HATTIE: What are you going to do?

VICTOR: I'm going to talk to Mr. Delacro, if he's there, if not I shall leave a message.

HATTIE: What sort of message?

VICTOR (*after consideration*): An invitation. (*He waits a moment or two.*) Hallo. Claridge's? I want to speak to Mr. Delacro, please—Mr. Charles Delacro. This is Tommy Steele here. Thanks a lot, Baby. (*His hand over the mouthpiece.*) It's the only way to get any service from telephone girls. I used to be Dickie Valentine. I switched to Tommy Steele about twelve months ago. Hullo? Is that Charles Delacro? It's Victor Rhyall here. How are you? Good.

[*Hattie crosses to him and puts her ear to the receiver.*]

VICTOR: Listen, I must apologise for not giving you more notice, but we wondered if you weren't doing anything better you'd care to come down for the week-end.

HATTIE: You're out of your mind.

VICTOR (*his hand over the mouthpiece*): Shut up and go and sit down.

[*Hattie puts her ear to the receiver again.*]

Oh, splendid. What a bit of luck. It'll be very

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quiet, I'm afraid. Just ourselves, and possibly a rather boring friend of Hilary's who drinks gin all day. Ouch! What? No, no, a little interference, that's all. Bring a rod and we'll frighten some fish. Any time after lunch. Splendid. Look forward to seeing you. Half a minute, I've just thought of something. My wife's coming down tomorrow. Yes, she's been in London all the week. I wonder if you'd be very kind and give her a lift? That is good of you. May I tell her to get in touch with you at Claridge's? Till tomorrow. Goodbye. (*Puts down the receiver and rubs his behind.*) You hurt me just then.

HATTIE: You shouldn't say I was boring. I think you're barking mad and I bet he doesn't come.

VICTOR: I'm not barking mad, and of course he'll come. Gives him another forty-eight hours with her. And he's saying to himself "Anything can happen in forty-eight hours". He thought of that before he accepted.

HATTIE: Was Hilary with him d'you think?

VICTOR: Probably.

HATTIE: And heard him accept?

VICTOR: Obviously.

HATTIE: Then I expect Charles had his behind pinched, too. She's not going to like it you know.

VICTOR: She's going to hate it like hell and be as jumpy as all get out, but unless she's prepared to admit the whole thing, there's absolutely nothing she can do about it. And if she does admit the whole thing, being a well brought up girl, she'll realise she's got to return the mink.

HATTIE: Perhaps you do understand a little about women after all. I take it I'm invited too?

VICTOR: Of course. I shall need your support. Did you bring a bag?

HATTIE: When you address me I prefer the word

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

suitcase, but as a matter of fact I did. It's in the car outside. But that doesn't mean I'm staying. I'm jumpy too!

VICTOR: Of course you're staying, it's your duty to stay.

HATTIE: Well, if you say it's my duty, darling, I suppose I must. By the way, I told Hilary I was going to the Crockfords for the week-end.

VICTOR: I'll say you've changed your mind as it's going to be more fun here.

HATTIE: Machiavelli might think it fun, I think it's going to be torture, but as you insist it's my duty I suppose I've got to put up with it. I wonder what is the exact interpretation of above and beyond the call of duty.

VICTOR: Hattie, it's just a nice quiet English week-end, that's all. You'll enjoy it.

HATTIE: I'd enjoy it more if I knew what you were up to. You've thought up something horrible I know that much.

VICTOR: Nonsense. Let's say I shall exploit any given opportunities.

HATTIE: Now what are you going to do with me until they arrive tomorrow—play scrabble?

VICTOR (*genially*): You can't spell, can you, but if that's what you'd like.

HATTIE: No, it's not. I'd like a good dinner and a bottle of something very expensive, and preferably fizzy.

VICTOR: Then I'll take you over to "The Horse and Groom". It's not far and not bad.

HATTIE (*being wicked*): How delicious! I shall enjoy having a gorgeous dinner with you again, darling. Will there be lovely soft lighting d'you think?

VICTOR: If there were any danger of that I'd take a torch. You're not to be outrageous, Hattie.

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[*The cuckoo starts to sing again.*]

There's that damned bird again. (*With sudden fury he slams the window shut.*)

HATTIE (*brightly*): Cuckoo, cuckoo. D'you know I've a feeling it's flown here straight from Claridge's.

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene I

The following evening.

The window curtains are not yet drawn. Outside the twilight has turned to nightfall.

Hilary and Hattie are seated beside a low coffee table on which is a scrabble board and the letters. The game has been left unfinished. A fire has been lit.

HILARY: What on earth d'you imagine they're talking about?

HATTIE: Fish.

HILARY: Oh, not still!

HATTIE: From a woman's point of view, the amount of time men spend talking about fish is quite humiliating, but perhaps on this occasion we ought to be rather thankful.

HILARY: I'm sure we shouldn't have left them alone together.

HATTIE: Nonsense, darling. They are behaving like positive buddies.

HILARY: I don't trust Victor when he's genial.

HATTIE: I don't trust him—period. Has he said anything?

HILARY: About Charles? Not a word. I've only seen him alone for about five minutes when we were dressing for dinner then he sang all the time—"Thanks for the Memory" until I could have screamed.

HATTIE (*amused*): He is a brute, isn't he?

HILARY: What's he up to? Why's he being so infuriating? What's his object?

HATTIE: Perhaps he hasn't any object.

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HILARY: Oh, nonsense. He must have some reason. He hasn't organised this ghastly situation for nothing.

HATTIE: Maybe he's a sadist. And enjoys watching you and Charles suffering. On the other hand of course he might be the other thing.

HILARY: What other thing?

HATTIE: You know, just the opposite. A what-you-may-call-'em. Someone who gets a kick out of being made unhappy. What's he called? Begins with an M.

HILARY: Masochist.

HATTIE: That's the chap.

HILARY: Rubbish!

HATTIE: I couldn't agree more. Seems to me absolute rubbish but there it is. And it's quite well known, or so I read in my Sunday papers. They say it's a result of a public school education.

HILARY: Oh, shut up, darling, you've got the whole thing muddled.

HATTIE: Have I? Well, I don't wonder. It is muddling, isn't it? It is to me, anyway. I'm just a girl——

HILARY: Who can't say no. Which reminds me—what did you and Victor do last night?

HATTIE: I told you, darling. We had a delicious dinner at the "Horse and Groom" and then came back here and played scrabble.

HILARY: I never quite trust you with Victor. Why didn't you dine here?

HATTIE: Victor said he felt like going out.

HILARY: Oh, he did! What time did you go to bed?

HATTIE: About half-past twelve, I think.

HILARY: Did Victor have much to drink?

HATTIE: Very little as far as I remember.

HILARY: But you can't play scrabble—not with grown-up people.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HATTIE: I know how to cheat at it. (*Sweetly.*) Where did you dine, darling?

HILARY (*a little discomfited*): The White Tower.

HATTIE: Oh, how gorgeous. And what time did you go to bed—nice and early? (*Pointing to the scrabble board in front of her.*) That was a splendid one of Victor's, wasn't it?

HILARY: What was?

HATTIE: His last turn before dinner. When you'd just got "conduct" and he put "mis" in front of it. That put us in the lead I think—where's the score?

HILARY (*turning and kicking viciously at the board, upsetting it and all the letters on the floor*): Damn boring game.

HATTIE: Yes, darling, madly boring, I quite agree. (*She goes on her hands and knees to pick up the letters.*) Come on, give me a hand. We'll say Sellars knocked it over putting down the coffee tray.

[*Hilary joins her on the floor.*]

I think it was simply wonderful of you not to kick it all over the room when he actually did it. Tremendous self-control it must have been. I was really filled with admiration.

HILARY: Is that why you giggled?

HATTIE: That was pure hysteria. You must admit it was quite a moment. I didn't dare to look at Charles.

[*Enter Sellars with the coffee tray. They are both hidden from his immediate view. He stands looking round the room rather puzzled.*]

What are we going to do for the rest of the evening?

HILARY: Don't ask me.

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HATTIE: Unless there's a panel of bachelors discussing marriage and divorce, perhaps it would be less embarrassing to watch television.

[Sellars reacts to Hattie's voice. He moves further into the room until he sees them both on the floor.]

SELLARS (*relieved*): Ah, there you are! I beg your pardon, milady, I couldn't understand where the voices were coming from.

HILARY: Put the coffee on here, will you. (*Indicating small table.*)

SELLARS: Yes, milady. Let me help you pick up these pieces, milady.

[He joins them on the floor.]

HILARY: I think we've got them all now. Unless there are any under the sofa.

[Sellars grovels under the sofa, retrieves one or two and gives them to Hilary.]

Thank you, Sellars. What are you laughing at?

SELLARS: I'm sorry, milady. I really couldn't help it. We must look as though we're playing bears.

HATTIE: Who's been eating my porridge?

HILARY: And who's been sleeping in my bed?

[Hattie's laughter ceases abruptly and they rise to their feet.]

Would you draw the curtains, please.

SELLARS: Certainly, milady.

[There is a silence while he does so.]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HILARY: And put another log on the fire. That makes it more cosy, doesn't it, darling?

HATTIE: Just about as cosy as when you fasten your safety-belt.

SELLARS: Will that be all, milady?

HILARY: Yes, thank you, Sellars. You might look into the dining room and tell them coffee'll be ready in five minutes.

SELLARS: Very good, milady.

HILARY: Oh, and did you notice a rather shabby old suitcase in Mr. Delacro's car?

SELLARS: I put it in his room.

HILARY: No, that one's mine.

SELLARS: I'll change it over. Have you a key for it?

HILARY: No, I haven't, but don't worry about that, just put it in my room.

SELLARS: Very good, milady. (*He switches on the lamp down right and the chandelier, and exits.*)

[*There is a pause.*]

HATTIE: I'm sorry I was bitchy just now.

HILARY: It was my fault. I'm sorry too. (*Pause.*) Oh, Hattie, what a hell of a thing to happen, isn't it?

HATTIE: Yes, darling, I suppose sometime tomorrow you want me to take Victor for a long walk so you can see Charles alone.

HILARY: Yes, please.

HATTIE: To say goodbye or *au revoir*?

HILARY: I don't know. I honestly don't know. It's a dreadful thing to confess, but I honestly do not know. I can give no guarantee of what I'm going to do or how I'm going to behave. D'you find that shocking?

HATTIE: Coming from you I do rather. Well, sur-

prising anyhow. Of course, it's the sort of feeling I've been having ever since I was about eleven.

HILARY: I could have said goodbye to him last night. I think I could. I'd made up my mind and I was all prepared. But now Victor's done everything he can think of to make it more difficult. I thought at least he might have been understanding—not sympathetic even—just understanding. But not a bit of it. He doesn't seem to give a damn about me. He knows bloody well I couldn't live without the children, and he thinks he's got me, so he's sitting down there being charming and polite like a beastly little boy who's asked his friend to tea.

HATTIE: Darling, the point is he's asked your friend to tea. Now what's he done that for? That's what I'd like to know.

HILARY: Did he talk about Charles to you last night?

HATTIE: Oh, yes, of course he did. He was rather rude about him.

HILARY: What did he say?

HATTIE: He said, in order to commemorate the number of liberties Americans had taken in this country in the last fifteen years—it was high time England had a Statue of Liberty of her own. Or did he say Libertine? I can't remember.

HILARY: Dreary, pompous little Englishman.

HATTIE: Grosvenor Square would be the proper site, he said.

HILARY: What else did he say? He must have said something else. Isn't he upset?

HATTIE: Yes, I think he's upset. I asked him if he thought there was any possibility of your running away with Charles.

HILARY: And what did he say?

HATTIE: He said he thought it would be a pity.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HILARY (*furious*): A pity! What's he mean, a pity?

HATTIE: But that if you did he wouldn't accept responsibility for either the mushrooms or Miss Mathews.

HILARY: And that was all?

HATTIE: Yes—except every time he heard the cuckoo he lost his temper. But on the whole he seemed to be taking it quite remarkably well.

HILARY: Doesn't he think of me at all? Doesn't he realise what I'm sacrificing! That if I give up Charles it's going to break my heart.

HATTIE: Hearts mend, Hil darling. They mend as good as new. They're designed for that particular purpose. Now quick, before they come up, tell me what you've done about the mink. You can't possibly give that up. That'd be a heartbreak you could never mend. Where is it?

HILARY: It's here. You didn't breathe a word about that to Victor, did you?

HATTIE: My dear, what d'you take me for? It's here, is it?

HILARY: I brought it down.

HATTIE: But what are you going to say?

HILARY: Well, I've had rather a brain wave.

[*She is interrupted by the entrance of Charles and Victor. They are in dinner jackets.*]

So I went to Harrods and bought a sponge.

VICTOR (*his manner throughout the following scene is casual and charming, never bright or forced*): There was an old boy who used to dine here in my youth, who when we joined the ladies—always entered the drawing room with the words "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith." My mother was always furious. But I

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so agree, don't you? Better a dinner of herbs where love is. Hattie, a glass of Kummel—or did you finish the bottle after lunch?

HATTIE: Now, don't you talk like that. You were so jolly mean with it I decided I'd give you some bigger glasses. Have you been talking about fish?

CHARLES: No, we were talking about women.

HATTIE: Fancy that!

CHARLES: Or rather ballerinas, which perhaps isn't quite the same thing, Mrs. Durrant.

HATTIE: Will you do me a great favour?

CHARLES: Why certainly.

HATTIE: Never call me by that name.

CHARLES: Why not?

HATTIE: Eueugh!

VICTOR (*handing glass to Hattie*): There you are, Mrs. Durrant, darling, the unexpended portion of a day's ration. Hilary, what for you? Similar, as they say in saloon bars?

HILARY: Well, you haven't got anything else, have you?

VICTOR: Sssh, darling, please. Not in front of a millionaire. And as a matter of fact I've some very good brandy, but I'm keeping that. For Charles and myself.

HILARY: I thought you were going to say for Christmas. I'll have some brandy, please.

VICTOR (*smiling*): And the stalled ox and hatred therewith! Charles, brandy?

CHARLES: Thank you.

HILARY (*handing coffee to Hattie*): Here's your coffee, darling.

VICTOR (*at the drink table, his back to Hilary*): Thank you, darling.

HILARY: Not you.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

VICTOR: Oh, I beg your pardon, I thought you said "darling". (*Turns to drink table.*)

HILARY: So I did. (*Handing cup to Charles.*) Here's yours.

VICTOR (*turning from drink table*): Thank you, darling. Oh, it's really too confusing. Next time I shall bring my own. (*Turns again to drink table.*)

HILARY: Victor.

VICTOR: Yes, darling?

HILARY: Here's your coffee.

VICTOR (*delivering brandy to Hilary and Charles*): Thank you, darling. *Nilil dictum quod non dictum prius.*

HATTIE: What's that mean?

VICTOR: Nothing is said that hasn't been said before. I'd said "thank you, darling" three times.

HATTIE: Oh, how dull. In medical books they always use Latin for the interesting bits.

HILARY: Hattie!

HATTIE: Well, they do, darling. Don't you remember in the one I borrowed from you it was all——

VICTOR: Very frustrating for you.

CHARLES: Are we going to finish our scrabble?

HILARY: I'm awfully sorry, but I'm afraid Sellars knocked the whole thing over when he brought in the coffee.

VICTOR: Thank you, darling.

HILARY: What are you thanking me for?

VICTOR: It's just habit. Every time you say coffee, I say thank you, darling.

CHARLES: Now isn't that just too bad, during dinner I thought of a way to use my Zee—sorry Zed to you.

HATTIE: Was that when Victor was talking about the future of the Liberal Party or Burgos Cathedral?

CHARLES: Now don't embarrass me.

HATTIE: I didn't listen to a word he said either.

CHARLES (*stopping to pick something up*): Here are two

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more scrabble letters. (*Looking at them.*) O and K. O.K.! Well, that must be a good omen.

HILARY: But of course. It must be.

VICTOR: Try them round the other way.

CHARLES: K.O.

VICTOR: Quite different, isn't it?

CHARLES: Knocked out. Well, that could be an omen too, I guess.

VICTOR: You never can tell, can you?

CHARLES: Which way round things are going to happen?

VICTOR: Or what to put first and what place second. If we knew that we'd all be a lot happier. Don't you agree?

CHARLES (*smiling and quite at ease*): Oh, yes, but as a general rule I'd say put yourself first and the other fellow second.

VICTOR: And supposing the other fellow disputes your arrangement?

CHARLES: Then you enter into competition.

VICTOR: And the race is to the swift, and the battle to the strong?

CHARLES: Sure.

VICTOR: D'you know I'm not at all sure. In theory I have to disagree with you, in practice you may well be right. It's a little primitive, but what's wrong with that?

HATTIE: What's primitive?

VICTOR: You are, darling.

HATTIE (*delighted*): Oh, am I really? Or is he being insulting?

CHARLES: On the contrary, I'd say he paid you a compliment.

VICTOR: He just says that because he is too.

HATTIE: Is Hilary primitive?

VICTOR: I'm beginning to wonder.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HILARY: More coffee?

VICTOR: No, thank you.

HATTIE: And what are you?

VICTOR: Sellars told me the other day that I was traditional. (*Taking one of the miniature portraits from the wall by the fireplace.*) Now Charles, here's a chap after your own heart.

CHARLES: Who was he?

VICTOR: My great grandfather. He ruined two men in one evening playing Faro, and killed another at five o'clock the next morning. He was a fellow of the Royal Society, too.

CHARLES: He must have been quite a fellow! Why did he kill the third guy, wouldn't he pay up?

VICTOR: No, no, it was an affair of the heart.

CHARLES: A woman?

VICTOR: Oh, yes, it was a woman. Gentlemen didn't fight over men in those days.

CHARLES: How did it happen?

VICTOR: He discovered his wife was about to elope with a wealthy young landowner from North Carolina. Beautiful country there, I believe. I've always wanted to see it. D'you know it at all?

CHARLES: Yes, indeed I know it well. (*Having fun.*) Still quite primitive in parts, I understand.

VICTOR (*enjoying it all*): Really. But you're not from the South yourself, are you?

CHARLES: No, I was born in New York state, but I've been around. But what happened—was he hanged?

VICTOR: No—no. It was a duel. Pistols. Somewhere near Highgate Ponds.

CHARLES: And what happened to the lady?

VICTOR: My great grandmother? She had several more children. Mostly by my great grandfather—and they lived happily ever after.

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HILARY (*acidly*): What a fascinating story. Why've you never told it me before?

VICTOR: I'm sorry, my dear, perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it now. I've always done my best to shelter you from the unpleasant sordid side of life. (*Taking another portrait from the wall and handing it to Charles.*) She was very lovely, don't you think?

CHARLES: She certainly was.

HILARY: Let me see that.

[*Charles hands it to her.*]

That's my great grandmother.

VICTOR: No, darling, it isn't.

HILARY: Of course it is.

VICTOR: No, it isn't. We sold yours to go to Grundelwald; you know I was only saying the other day, if the morals of this century get any worse it might be quite a good thing to re-introduce duelling. Make it legal, I mean.

HATTIE: How would that help?

VICTOR: Cut the divorce rate in half.

HATTIE: Might cut the husbands in half too. Then what should we do about alimony?

HILARY: You'd be a widow and get the lot.

HATTIE: Then I think it's a marvellous idea! Can't you do anything about it, Victor?

VICTOR: I was just wondering. Let me give you some more brandy, Charles.

CHARLES: Thank you.

VICTOR (*pouring brandy*): As the government insists that nuclear weapons are a deterrent against war, then surely they'd have to accept duelling as a deterrent against divorce. Might get a bill through the Commons on that basis. It would all depend——

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HATTIE: On whether the big shots were good shots? Ha, ha, ha!

VICTOR (*holding brandy bottle towards Hattie's glass*): Hattie? More Kummel?

HATTIE: Yes, please.

VICTOR (*taking her glass*): I did warn you about Hattie, didn't I, Charles? Hilary, darling, you haven't told me what you did in London this week. Did you have fun?

HILARY: Yes, thank you.

VICTOR: What did you do?

HILARY (*shrugging*): Oh, you know, the usual things one does in London. Oh! That reminds me——

VICTOR: Of what?

HILARY: Well I—I say, I do hope you're not going to be stuffy and say I've been dishonest.

VICTOR: Stuffy! You make me sound like a bed-sitting room. What have you done?

HILARY: Well, one morning——

VICTOR: A long time ago in the beautiful old city of Hamlin—that's your voice for children's stories, Hilary. I don't trust it.

HILARY (*annoyed, goes back to normal*): I found a cloakroom ticket for a taxi in a suitcase.

VICTOR: That can't be right.

HILARY: I mean I found a cloakroom ticket for a suitcase in a taxi.

VICTOR: You did?

HILARY: Yes.

VICTOR: So of course you gave it to the driver.

HILARY: No, I didn't I'm afraid.

VICTOR: Now Hilary, you're not going to tell me you went and got it out?

HILARY: Yes, I did.

VICTOR: How thoroughly disgraceful! Where was it?

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HILARY: Victoria, Victor. Which seemed a sort of omen. There was an awful lot to pay on it. It had been there for simply ages. So I thought the person might have died or something.

HATTIE: Or it might have been stolen property and the thief got windy and dumped it there. My God! There wasn't a body in it, was there?

HILARY: I don't know.

VICTOR: What d'you mean, you don't know?

HILARY: I haven't opened it yet. It's locked and none of my keys would fit.

VICTOR: Charles, d'you hear this astounding confession?

CHARLES (*he is looking at the mantelpiece*): I'm trying not to.

VICTOR: That's very good of you. I appreciate it. I must say I'm astonished at you, Hilary. I mean short-changing the public when they pay their entrance money, and selling old mushrooms as fresh—that's one thing, but you've never done anything criminal before.

HILARY: It's not criminal. I found the ticket. I didn't steal it.

VICTOR: The fact remains, you're in possession of someone else's property. Well now what are we going to do. Obviously we ought to return it, but we can't do that without getting involved with the police officials, and the National Press. All of whom I'm very frightened of.

HATTIE: What's the point of returning it now? You'd never get it back to the proper owner. Anyway, he shouldn't have been so careless as to lose the ticket.

VICTOR: And it would end up as lost property. I suppose the first thing to do is to find out what's inside it. Let's hope it's nothing of value. Where is it?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HILARY: It's in my room.

VICTOR: I'll get my keys and see if they're any good. And I'll tell Sellars to bring it down. (*He turns at the door.*) Charles—Hattie.

HATTIE: What, darling?

VICTOR: Not the least embarrassing part of Hilary's behaviour is that I must ask you to promise me—not only for her sake but for mine as well—not to repeat what's happened and to try to forget all about it.

HATTIE: Of course we promise. Don't we?

CHARLES: Why, yes, sure. It's forgotten.

VICTOR: We're very grateful, aren't we, darling?

HILARY: I'm very sorry. I should never have done it, I know, but—

VICTOR: Of course you shouldn't have done it, but d'you know something? I have a horrible feeling I should have done the same thing myself.

HATTIE: I must say I think it's all rather exciting.

VICTOR: Really, Hattie, you talk as if Hilary had won some money from Littlewoods.

[*Exits.*]

HATTIE: It's the mink, of course.

HILARY: Yes.

HATTIE: My dear, what a perfectly brilliant idea.

He fell for it hook, line and sinker.

HILARY (*almost in tears*): Oh, Hattie, I feel so awful. And I'm so hopeless at lying.

HATTIE: You're not doing so badly.

HILARY: And he was so sweet about it, wasn't he?

CHARLES: Listen, Hattie, go and powder your nose, will you, I've got to talk to Hilary. And if you can find Victor, keep him away as long as possible.

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HATTIE (*kissing Hilary*): Now you mustn't be upset, my sweet. (*To Charles.*) I feel just like Friar Lawrence.

[*Exits.*]

CHARLES: Come here.

HILARY: No. And you stay where you are.

CHARLES: Why?

HILARY: I can't think clearly when I'm near you.

CHARLES: What d'you mean?

HILARY: You know exactly what I mean. D'you remember saying that to me? You were standing just there.

CHARLES: Darling, I've had enough. I can't take this any longer. Don't tell me, I know . . . it's my own fault. I insisted on coming, I know that. It meant two days with you. Now I know that he knows. He knows that I know he knows. He knows that you know he knows. And Hattie knows. We all know we all know. A top secret we all know. Like the day before D Day. Well the hell with the top secret.

HILARY: What d'you mean?

CHARLES: Let's come clean. Let me talk to him.

HILARY: No, you made a promise.

CHARLES: And I think I've decided to break it.

HILARY: Darling, no, please, please no. You must think of me.

CHARLES: I haven't thought of anything else since the moment I set eyes on you. (*Begins to move slowly towards her.*)

HILARY: Stay where you are.

CHARLES (*retreating infuriated*): Now listen, Victor knows all about it. Does he seem upset? Does he seem jealous? Does he appear to care one way or another? (*He waits.*) Answer me.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HILARY: Of course he cares. But he's not a very jealous person.

CHARLES: Well, in his position he ought to be jealous. I don't think he gives a damn.

HILARY: Yes, he ought to be a little bit jealous, oughtn't he? Hattie asked him if he'd considered the possibility of my running away with you, and d'you know what he said?

CHARLES: What?

HILARY: He said he thought it would be a pity. A pity!

CHARLES: Well, there you are. If he really cared, if you were really important to him, d'you imagine for one moment he'd have asked me down here? Of course he wouldn't. Not unless he's a lunatic.

HILARY: No, he's not a lunatic. But he's never really been quite like other boys. This may be his way of saying—"All right, I understand. We don't have to talk about it or discuss it. Just as long as you stay here that's all."

CHARLES: D'you honestly believe that?

HILARY: I'm in such a muddle, darling, I don't know what I believe.

CHARLES: Well, I know what I believe. I believe you love me. I believe I could make you happy. And I believe without upsetting Victor a very great deal, you could get a divorce and marry me.

HILARY: Perhaps you don't understand Englishmen very well.

CHARLES: Who does?

HILARY: English women.

CHARLES: Darling, we're wasting precious time.

HILARY: Then kiss me.

CHARLES: How can I? You're too far away.

HILARY: Then come here.

CHARLES: You told me not to.

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HILARY: I've changed my mind.

CHARLES: Does that mean you'll marry me?

HILARY: No. Oh, Charles, darling, can't you see——

CHARLES: I shall talk to him as soon as you've gone to bed.

HILARY: He may guess what you're going to say and head you off by going to bed himself.

CHARLES: I can make it so he can't. And if things go the way I think they will, I'll stay here and we can all discuss it in the morning. If he acts up I'll drive back to London tonight. I'll cancel my plans and arrange to stay in England all summer.

HILARY: You're so beautifully determined, no wonder I'm in love with you.

CHARLES: If I'm not here tomorrow, will you call me?

HILARY: No.

CHARLES: We've had this conversation before.

HILARY: We keep doing that, don't we?

CHARLES: Remember?

HILARY: Only a week ago.

CHARLES: For me it was a week with only four days in it. Oh, Hilary, darling! I could give you such a lovely life.

HILARY: I was having quite a lovely life before you came into it.

CHARLES: Will you call me?

HILARY: I suppose I will—just like I did the first time I said I wouldn't.

CHARLES: Does that mean you'll change your mind?

HILARY: I don't know what I shall do with my mind. I'm not really in a fit state to be in charge of it. Someone else ought to drive it for me, park it somewhere and then later on, when you've gone away, I'll go and collect it.

[*Enter Hattie and Victor.*]

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

HATTIE: It's coming down, with Sellars.

VICTOR: We ought to be able to open it with one of these.

[*Hattie does a loud yawn and curls up in the chair.*]

Oh yes, Hattie's going to bed, darling, she says she's tired. I expect you are too, after your week in London.

HILARY (*looking at Charles*): It was four days, not a week.

VICTOR: Charles, I thought if they're going to leave us and go to bed, you and I might have a game of billiards, it's quite early yet. Would you like to?

CHARLES: Yes, I would. But I warn you I don't know your English game.

VICTOR: I'm not sure I do very clearly, but we can make it up as we go along.

HILARY: Perhaps Charles doesn't want to play. Why don't we all have an early night?

CHARLES: No, I'd like to play.

VICTOR: Good! And we'll take the brandy with us.

HATTIE: That means they'll finish up playing Billiard Fives.

[*Enter Sellars with the suitcase.*]

VICTOR: Ah, there you are, Sellars. Bring it over here. That's it, now try some of these. (*Hands the keys to Sellars who sets to work.*)

HATTIE: It's heavy, isn't it?

HILARY: Heavy.

HATTIE: You couldn't really get a body in there, could you? Not unless it was cut up, of course.

VICTOR: Don't be disgusting.

HATTIE: All right then—dismembered.

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VICTOR: That sounds worse.

HATTIE: I expect that's why the papers always use it.

VICTOR: Put it up here, Sellars, you'll find it easier. That's better, isn't it?

HATTIE: It's a shabby old case—can't have belonged to anyone very posh!

VICTOR: Posh! Dismembered! Really Hattie, your vocabulary's most bizarre.

HATTIE: But then so am I, darling. I was just thinking, perhaps it's not to be opened till Christmas.

SELLARS: Or maybe it's like Pandora's Box, madam, and we shouldn't open it at all! Ah! There it is.

[The lid of the suitcase flies open and out fall a cricket bat, three old cricket pads, four croquet balls and some London telephone directories, and a string of flags.]

HATTIE: I told you, it didn't belong to anyone very posh.

Curtain

Scene 2

Later the same night.

As the curtain rises the stage is empty. The lights are still on and the fire is still burning. Two dinner jackets have been flung carelessly on the back of the sofa. Charles enters from the door leading to the public rooms. He is without his coat and is carrying a Luger revolver. He goes to the drink table then glances round the room looking for the brandy.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

Enter Sellars in his shirt sleeves.

SELLARS: His lordship's waiting, sir. Are you looking for anything, sir?

CHARLES: I was looking for the brandy, Sellars.

SELLARS: His lordship's got it up the other end of the corridor, sir.

CHARLES: Oh!

SELLARS: I'll fetch it, sir, if you feel in need of it.

CHARLES: Thank you, Sellars. (*Reluctantly.*) No, no, don't bother. Maybe I'll do better without it.

SELLARS: You were lucky to win the toss, sir. That Luger's a far better job than the .38 his lordship's got.

VICTOR (*off*): Come on! What are you doing?

SELLARS (*calling round the door*): Just going over the procedure again, milord, with Mr. Delacro.

VICTOR (*off*): Well buck up! It's draughty here.

SELLARS: Now, are you quite clear about the drill, sir? I shall count one, two, three, and on the word fire you turn and shoot.

CHARLES: O.K. Thank you, Sellars.

VICTOR (*off*): Sellars, I think I'd better have my spectacles.

SELLARS (*shouting*): Very good, milord. Where are they?

VICTOR (*off*): They're in my coat.

[*Sellars finds the spectacles and moves towards the door, where he turns.*]

SELLARS: Good luck, sir.

CHARLES: Thank you, Sellars.

SELLARS: As I'm also his lordship's second, I shall, of course, wish him good luck too, sir.

CHARLES: But of course.

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[*Exit Sellars. Charles moves towards the door, hesitates uncertainly, then returns to his dinner jacket and takes from the pocket a pair of spectacles and puts them on. He exits. There is a short silence.*]

SELLARS (*off*): Now, gentlemen, are you both absolutely clear as to procedure? (*Pause.*) I shall repeat it once more. I shall count one, two, three, and on the command "fire" you turn and shoot. Any questions? Good. Now one further detail. Are there any messages, milord?

VICTOR (*off*): I should like you to have my cuff links, Sellars.

SELLARS (*off*): Thank you, milord.

CHARLES (*off*): You can have my Cadillac, Sellars—the keys are on my dressing table.

SELLARS (*off*): That's very good of you. Thank you, sir. Now gentlemen! On your marks, please. Check your safety catches. Get ready. One—two—three. Fire!

[*Two deafening shots are exchanged, followed instantly by a tremendous crash, as of some heavy object falling and smashing.*]

SELLARS (*off*): Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear!

[*There is absolute silence.*]

VICTOR (*off*): Well, it doesn't look as though you'll get my cuff links, Sellars.

SELLARS (*off*): No, milord. Are you all right, Mr. Delacro?

VICTOR (*entering; he has been wounded in the left arm*): Sellars, don't forget the brandy.

CHARLES (*entering*): Are you all right?

VICTOR: Yes, quite all right. Will you enter me up

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

in your game book, Charles? Under various, I suppose.

[Enter Sellars. He switches on lights by up left door, then crosses to telephone.]

CHARLES: I can't understand this, it must fire way off to the left.

VICTOR: What are you doing, Sellars?

SELLARS: Telephoning the doctor, milord.

VICTOR: Well don't. Put that thing down.

CHARLES: Now don't be absurd, you've got to have a doctor.

VICTOR: Of course I've got to have a doctor—I know that. Sellars, give me a very large brandy. I do beg your pardon, Charles, give us both a very large brandy.

SELLARS: Would you mind if I had one too, milord? I'm feeling a little faint.

VICTOR: My God! I didn't hit you, did I, Sellars?

SELLARS: No milord, you hit a marble bust of George the Fourth at the end of the corridor.

VICTOR: Oh, what a great pity. I was rather attached to it. But it was quite an understandable mistake, your features are very alike. And now you'll be able to tell your friends you once had your life saved by a king of England. Better not mention which one or they'll think you're the Flying Dutchman.

CHARLES: Now look here, I'm afraid I'm going to insist on calling that doctor. You can't just sit around here with a bullet hole in you, drinking brandy. You may not feel much at the moment, but that's going to hurt later on.

VICTOR: Yes, I daresay, but to get him on the telephone would be a mistake, and I'd rather you didn't.

CHARLES: What's his number?

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VICTOR: I shan't tell you. The local exchange have a twenty-four hour monitoring system. (*Taking brandy from Sellars.*) Thank you. (*Raising his glass to Charles.*) Foolish as it may sound, I drink to your continued good health.

CHARLES: I drink to shooting and fishing.

VICTOR: And to George the Fourth surely. Sellars, you'll have to clean these revolvers, I'm afraid I can't manage them.

[*All three are drinking their brandy as Hattie enters, sees Sellars with revolvers, screams, holds up her hands and hides behind the armchair. She is followed immediately by Hilary.*]

HILARY: What's happening?

HATTIE: They're all wearing glasses.

HILARY: Sellars, what's the matter with you?

SELLARS: Nothing at all, milady.

HILARY: Now, Sellars, nobody's going to hurt you. Victor, can't you do something?

VICTOR: You've got the wrong end of the stick, darling, he's only going to clean them, isn't he, Charles.

HILARY: Victor, what's the matter with your arm? What have you done, what's been happening?

VICTOR: Charles and I had a duel. I missed him.

HILARY: A duel. Don't be ridiculous.

VICTOR: I'm not being ridiculous, it's perfectly true.

HATTIE: I thought you'd started *Son et Lumière*.

HILARY: You and Charles fought a duel?

VICTOR: Yes.

HILARY: You must be out of your mind. Supposing you'd woken Emma.

VICTOR: Don't be so unromantic.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

HILARY: Duelling. I've never heard of anything so absolutely preposterous. You're the Earl of Rhyall not the Count of Monte Cristo. Hattie, call the doctor, will you, his number's two nine. I do apologise, Sellars. . . .

SELLARS: A very natural mistake, milady.

[*Hilary exits.*]

VICTOR: No, Hattie, don't. If we call him on the telephone the exchange will listen in to the conversation, and by tomorrow morning the whole damn village will know, and by the evening it will be in the papers. Somebody'd better fetch him.

CHARLES: I'll go.

VICTOR: Thank you, that would be very kind.

HATTIE: Well, that's the least he can do. Anyway, you're not supposed to have a duel without a doctor. In the pictures he's always the one with a bag, and without a beard.

CHARLES: Where does he live?

VICTOR: In the village, same side as the church. He's got a magnolia tree in the garden, and his brass plate on the gate—you can't miss it.

CHARLES: How do I get to the village?

HATTIE: I know the way—I'll come with you. Wait two minutes while I put something on. (*Crossing to Victor.*) You look frightfully romantic, but you are all right, darling?

VICTOR: Perfectly all right, thank you.

HATTIE: Honest?

VICTOR: Honest.

HATTIE: Had we better tell the doctor to send for an ambulance?

VICTOR: Certainly not, I'm staying here. Tell him there's been a slight accident. You'll have to explain

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what it is, but say I'm pretty sure it's nothing serious and only a flesh wound.

HATTIE: How shall we say it happened?

SELLARS: Excuse me, milord, would you be more comfortable here?

VICTOR: Tell him my butler, who is a highly nervous man, mistook me for a burglar and took a shot at me. You don't mind, do you, Sellars?

SELLARS: Not at all, milord.

CHARLES: Is he going to believe it?

VICTOR: He's a nice chap, but a snob, they always believe anything. The police have their Fete in the grounds here in July, so they'll have to believe it too.

HATTIE (*kissing his cheek*): You are clever, you think of everything, don't you?

CHARLES: Come on, Hattie, we ought to get going.

HATTIE: You wait here, Charles. I'll give you a shout when I'm ready.

[*Moves to door just as Hilary enters with Victor's dressing gown, cotton wool and bandages.*]

Victor wouldn't let me telephone the doctor, so Charles and I are going to fetch him.

HILARY: Be as quick as you can, won't you?

HATTIE: Yes, darling, of course.

[*Exits.*]

HILARY (*crosses to Victor and begins attending to his wounds*): I heard a terrific crash as well as the shots—was that you falling?

VICTOR: No, that was George the Fourth, whom I mistook for Charles.

HILARY: Then you're not damaged anywhere else?

VICTOR: No, darling.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

HILARY: Am I hurting?

VICTOR: No, darling. You needn't wait any longer, Sellars, and thank you for all your help.

SELLARS: No, no, no, milord.

VICTOR (*to Hilary*): Sellars acted as second to both of us, and conducted the whole thing quite admirably.

HILARY: Sellars, would you get a hot water bottle, please?

SELLARS: Yes, milady. (*Exits.*)

CHARLES: I don't think it's bad, is it?

HILARY: I don't think it is, luckily, but I can't really tell.

CHARLES: How are you feeling?

VICTOR: Like another brandy.

HILARY (*firmly*): No.

VICTOR: Hilary, I warn you if you talk like that I shall finish the bottle. (*Hands his glass to Charles.*) Thank you, Charles.

CHARLES: I suppose I am just as much to blame as he is, but I really had no alternative. I tried to talk to him, but he merely kept repeating his challenge. If I accepted he promised to discuss the whole thing afterwards.

HILARY: Supposing one of you'd been killed, or both of you.

VICTOR: Precisely. Pointless to discuss it before.

CHARLES: On the other hand, if I refused I was to return to London immediately.

[*Hilary has finished her bandage and helps Victor into his dressing gown.*]

VICTOR: Thank you. Well, go on, tell her the rest.

CHARLES: He called Sellars in, repeated the challenge in front of him and said if I didn't accept in five minutes, he'd tell him to telephone the press, and

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give them an eye witness account of the whole story.
VICTOR: What the butler saw in stereoscopic sound.
He really had no choice, did he, darling? (*Taking brandy from Charles.*) Thank you so much.

HILARY: Why didn't you miss him? He missed you.

CHARLES: Well, goddamit, I nearly missed him.

VICTOR: That wouldn't have done any good, anyway. According to the Sellars rules, you start at thirty paces, if you both miss you advance five yards and fire again. You get three shots in all. Rather like darts, only you move nearer each time.

HATTIE (*calling off*): Hurry up, Charles, I'm waiting.

CHARLES: I'll be right back.

[*Exits.*]

VICTOR: The West Corridor was long enough, of course, but one felt rather cramped. We wanted to have it outside, but that would have meant waiting until it was light, and I didn't want to keep Sellars up. Besides, we might have been rather drunk by then.

HILARY: I think you're drunk now.

VICTOR: I never drink when I'm duelling.

[*Enter Sellars with a bottle of champagne and two glasses.*]

HILARY: What on earth have you got there, Sellars?

SELLARS: The champagne his lordship ordered.

VICTOR: Oh, thank you, open it will you, Sellars.

HILARY: When did you order champagne?

VICTOR: When did I order it, Sellars?

SELLARS: Earlier this evening, milord.

HILARY: Why?

VICTOR: I thought we might need it.

HILARY: Have we anything to celebrate?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

VICTOR: I thought we might get thirsty, I got it from the grocers. I hope it's all right.

HILARY: On my bill, I suppose.

VICTOR: I'll pay you back.

HILARY (*understanding his real reason*): You really got it to be friendly, didn't you?

VICTOR: You have a wonderful gift of choosing the right word.

HILARY (*taking glass*): Thank you, Sellars.

VICTOR (*taking his glass*): Thank you, have a glass yourself.

SELLARS: No thank you, milord. (*Moves to door.*) As I've served his lordship's cold bottle, milady, I'll now go and attend to his hot one.

[*Exits.*]

VICTOR: Good luck. (*He drinks, but she does not.*) Come on, drink up. I'm glad you thought it friendly.

HILARY: I'm sorry about this, Victor. Very, very sorry.

VICTOR: Then drown your sorrow.

HILARY: I'm not sure I can.

VICTOR: You're not cross with me, are you?

HILARY: No, I'm not cross—I just think you should see a doctor.

VICTOR: But I am going to see a doctor.

HILARY: Not him. I mean a specialist. A brain specialist for mental disorders. D'you realise you might have been killed, or disabled for life, or put in prison for manslaughter?

VICTOR: You should be flattered I risked so much for you.

HILARY: I thought you were an intelligent, civilised person and you behave like a barbarian.

VICTOR: Oh, come now, you can't call the elder Pitt

a barbarian, or Sheridan, or Canning, or Byron or even the Iron Duke. They were all duellists. Besides, what else do you expect me to do with an American millionaire who with half-a-crown's worth of aid to Britain, walks into my house and disrupts my life.

HILARY: I'm just as much to blame as he is. Listen, Victor, I know I've behaved disgracefully, but let me try and explain what's happened to me.

VICTOR: We know that. You've fallen in love.

HILARY: For the past week I've been more or less sort of schizophrenic, and feeling so sorry for that poor little squirrel.

VICTOR: What on earth are you talking about?

HILARY: Your squirrel with two heads, don't you remember? Poor chap, I know how miserable he must have felt—I've got two heads myself now.

VICTOR: They're both very pretty heads.

HILARY: One is appalled by my behaviour, the other approves it. Two of my eyes are dazzled, bewitched and so happy, the other two have tears in them. I can't explain it any other way, and I don't expect you to understand it.

VICTOR: But of course I understand it. And I'm only so grateful to you for not saying "This is something stronger than I am."

HILARY: Well, if you want the plain, honest truth, that's exactly what it was.

VICTOR: Why the past tense?

HILARY: Because it is in the past tense. Not that you appear to give a damn about it anyway.

VICTOR: What makes you say that?

HILARY: From what I gather from Hattie, all you said was you thought it was a pity.

VICTOR: Ah no, I said I thought it'd be a pity if you ran away with Charles. I can't see you in what's

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

called the international set, my darling. Not the glitter and glare of St. Moritz and Palm Beach. You're English and you need the gentleness of the rain and the soft winds of England.

HILARY: And a nest of robins in my hair.

VICTOR: Besides, you'd be wearing sun glasses all the year round and nobody would see the colour of your eyes. That'd be a very great pity.

HILARY: Anyway, who's suggesting such a life for me?

VICTOR: Charles is, isn't he? I suppose you'd have someone to pack for you.

HILARY: And that's the only reason you think it would be a pity?

VICTOR: No, no, certainly not. I can think of a thousand pities.

HILARY: But none from your point of view?

VICTOR: Oh, yes, indeed. But let's not go into that.

HILARY: Why not?

VICTOR: Because this is hardly the moment. Let's just say I should miss going to bed with you, and there'd be nobody to do the Christmas cards.

HILARY: You seem to overlook the fact that if you hadn't invited Charles here for the week-end I should already have said goodbye to him, and the whole thing might have been finished and done with.

VICTOR: Unfinished and done with. Very different. A most unsatisfactory state of affairs for all concerned.

HILARY: And you think you've saved us all from that by getting yourself shot up in a duel.

VICTOR: Not at all. Though I admit a duel was an essential part of an effort to try and preserve our marriage.

HILARY: I'm a little confused. From the way you've been talking, I imagined you were hell bent and hot foot for the Divorce Court.

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VICTOR: Who said anything about divorce? I never mentioned it. I don't like divorce. I like marriage. I mean, it's like the boat race, you've got to pick one or the other, haven't you? And I'll tell you something else—I don't think adultery sufficient grounds for it.
HILARY: What a masculine attitude.

VICTOR: I don't think marriage is just a liaison to be terminated when the sexual side of it becomes boring or irksome to either party.

HILARY: It's never been boring or irksome. Not for me it hasn't. And don't talk about "either party". It makes the whole thing sound like a contract.

VICTOR: When two people make promises, what else can it be but a contract? You promised to be faithful. Well, you've broken that one. Am I to respond by breaking one of mine? To have and to hold from this day forth for better for worse. This moment in our lives must obviously come under the heading "for worse". And the popular measure taken nowadays is to say "Well, the better part of it's over and here we are with the worse, so goodbye, my dear, thank you so much. It was fun while it lasted. You take your boy friend, I'll take my freedom, and I'll be on the Riviera before you". Well, I think that's wrong. If your mistress is unfaithful, she should be discarded. If your wife is, she should be befriended.

HILARY: Befriended? Meaning helped and patronised?

VICTOR: Meaning beloved and cherished. Unless she's a promiscuous trollop, of course, then the situation is out of control and quite hopeless.

HILARY: I'm not a promiscuous trollop, and it's never happened before.

VICTOR: I didn't say you were and I know it hasn't.

HILARY: It has with you.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

VICTOR (*loudly*): Objection!

HILARY: Objection over-ruled. How do I know you're not a promiscuous—whatever the masculine is of trollop?

VICTOR: The same way you know I don't like French mustard or going to the opera—because we've been living together for twelve years.

HILARY: I wonder why "living together" sounds so much more fun than if you'd said married for twelve years?

VICTOR: To me it doesn't. I think marriage is great fun—thank you very much. (*Pause, then very sincerely.*)

That thank you very much, by the way, wasn't just a figure of speech, it meant I'm very grateful to you for having made it fun. I thought perhaps now was the right moment to say thank you.

HILARY (*a little affected*): Ditto, ditto—as we used to say.

VICTOR: Now I find myself up a bit of a gum tree.

HILARY: Why?

[*Enter Sellars with hot water bottle.*]

SELLARS: The hot water bottle, milady.

HILARY: Thank you.

SELLARS: I'm sorry we didn't have a—how shall I put it?—home win, milord.

VICTOR: I'm sorry we kept you up so late, Sellars, and thank you.

SELLARS: That's all right, milord, and it's I should be thanking you really. I've learnt a great deal from the events this evening.

HILARY: What have you learnt, Sellars?

SELLARS: Amongst other things, that my novel's no good, milady.

HILARY: Oh.

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SELLARS: I'm about to go upstairs and tear it up.
It's not true to life at all.

[*Exit.*]

VICTOR: How can anyone say what's true to life?
Now where was I?

HILARY: Up a gum tree.

VICTOR: Oh, yes. And very uncomfortable too,
because the role of complaisant husband I find dis-
tasteful and the jealous one rather ludicrous. In
point of fact—much to my annoyance—I turn out to
be both.

HILARY: Are you jealous?

VICTOR: Very.

HILARY: It would be rather hurtful if you weren't.

VICTOR: Then you must feel very gratified.

HILARY: Yes, I do, thank you, darling. Are you
really sure you're jealous?

VICTOR: Yes, I am quite sure. Why?

HILARY: I wondered if it wasn't just a sense of
possession that had been aroused in you. Losing
something that belonged to you.

VICTOR: Like the contents of a suitcase? No, it's
a little more than that.

HILARY: Where is it?

VICTOR: Where is what?

HILARY: You know damn well what. Come on,
where is it?

VICTOR: I really haven't the faintest idea what on
earth you're talking about.

HILARY: We're talking about the contents of a suit-
case.

VICTOR: Oh. Oh, but that was merely, as I said
before, a figure of speech. Hadn't you better go and
put a little make-up on?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

HILARY (*infuriated*): Why the hell should I put make-up on—for Doctor Fenton?

VICTOR: No, of course not. For Charles. I'm used to seeing you like that, he probably isn't. You don't want to distress him. Not that you're not looking most attractive. I always rather like you like that, but he may have different ideas, my darling. I suppose really I shouldn't call you my darling. That again has become merely a figure of speech. I think I'd better have some more champagne, this is beginning to hurt.

HILARY: Are you all right, d'you think?

VICTOR: Yes, thank you.

HILARY (*handing him the glass*): Now drink that up and let me get you into bed.

VICTOR: Despite the fact I'm your husband, in the present circumstances I find that a most improper suggestion.

HILARY: You may have talked a certain amount of sense, but there's been an awful lot of hot air, too, you know.

VICTOR: Nonsense. It's all been sense. What d'you mean—hot air?

HILARY: About my needing the softness of the winds and the gentleness of the rain. Do you remember last winter when we couldn't get out of here because the softness of the English winds had blown three lime trees down across the drive, and the gentleness of the rain had flooded the cellars and all my mushrooms? Incidentally, do you think I like growing mushrooms? Do you think I really like living in a few rooms of an enormous damp mansion? And you know you're wrong about the international set, I think I should simply adore them, I've always longed to meet them. I could water ski and aqua lung, instead of that well-known English pastime

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of making both ends meet. It'd be so wonderful for the children too, wouldn't it?

[There is no response from Victor.]

Surely you must see it's very tempting?

VICTOR: Oh, yes, indeed. The grass is always greener the other side of the hedge, isn't it? No, you ought to think it over very carefully.

HILARY: Oh, I have.

[Victor looks at her rather quickly.]

Perhaps I still am.

VICTOR: Well, if that's what you want, I shall have to think again.

HILARY: But what I can't understand is why you had to fight a duel?

VICTOR: To make my role of complaisant husband a little less ignoble, I think the word is—and my proposition a little less disgraceful.

HILARY: What proposition?

VICTOR: Also to—to remind you I'm very fond of you. I didn't want to write you a letter or send you roses. I thought a duel was just the ticket.

HILARY (*angrily*): Just the ticket! Where to? A crematorium?

VICTOR: No, no. A cloakroom.

HILARY: Shut up! You haven't told me where it is. And what would have happened if you'd killed Charles? What d'you think I'd have done?

VICTOR: Well, now I'll let you into a secret. I'm a very reliable shot—even with a revolver.

HILARY: Well, go on.

VICTOR: Go on what?

HILARY: What's your proposition?

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

VICTOR: Well, I suggest that we declare a sort of moratorium.

HILARY: How d'you mean?

VICTOR: An armistice—intermission—lunch break, call it what you like. You go off with your damn millionaire. I'll wait here till you come back.

HILARY: For how long?

VICTOR: Two or three months.

HILARY: Ah! yes, I see. And—"and wash that man right out of my hair?" Is that the idea?

VICTOR: I think the next line was "and send him on his way". Which I sincerely hope you'll do—bloody tourist, let him go sight-seeing somewhere else.

HILARY: You really mean you'd be prepared to loan me to another man for three months in order to get him out of my system?

VICTOR: Yes, shocking as it may seem I think it's the safest route.

HILARY: To back where we were?

VICTOR: To back where we were.

HILARY: You must love me very much.

VICTOR: Love and like and value.

HILARY: Supposing it doesn't work out like that?

VICTOR: That's a chance I have to take, because it's the only one I've got.

HILARY: Yes, it is, isn't it. I can see why you call it a disgraceful proposition, but it has its points. (*Her thoughts suddenly interrupted.*) Promise you'll take me back.

VICTOR: I promise.

HILARY: And if at the end of two or three months I want a divorce to marry Charles, you'd be agreeable?

VICTOR: On the contrary, I'd be very disagreeable.

HILARY: That doesn't answer my question.

VICTOR: Let's discuss it when the time comes.

HILARY: And you don't want to take me back now?

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VICTOR (*looks at her for a moment or two, then shakes his head*): No.

HILARY: Why not?

VICTOR: You're too pretty to have as a housekeeper.

HILARY: And what about you? What'll you do the next two or three months?

VICTOR: I shall cross the days off a calendar and hope you're having bad weather, and Charles is getting on your nerves.

HILARY: That's not very kind.

VICTOR: I feel angry, jealous, indignant and unhappy, but certainly not kind. But there it is. Marriage isn't like a tray of hors d'oeuvres, you can't just pick what you fancy. You've got to take the lot or nothing.

HILARY (*brightly*): Well, it's all settled, then. (*Moving towards him.*) I'm sorry you were wounded. Is it very painful?

VICTOR: Yes, it is a bit now.

HILARY: I think it was simply wonderful of you to fight a duel over me, it really was very romantic and I'm terribly touched. (*Very close to him.*) And very grateful.

VICTOR: For what?

HILARY: For missing Charles.

VICTOR: If you're going to talk like that I'll be sorry I did.

HILARY (*her face almost touching his*): Aren't you going to say goodbye? (*Pause.*) But then of course according to you, we shan't know for a couple of months if it really is goodbye, shall we?

[*She is interrupted by the entrance of Charles. Hilary and Victor move apart rather guiltily.*]

CHARLES: He'll be here in a few minutes. He

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

followed us in his own car, so he could get home again. How are you feeling now?

VICTOR: Charles, we've talked the whole thing over, and I've decided——

HILARY: No, darling, I've decided. Victor's idea is that I should come away with you for three months, at the end of which time he hopes I shall return to him.

CHARLES: Having got bored with me.

HILARY: Exactly.

VICTOR: Come now, I didn't put it quite as crudely as that, did I?

CHARLES: I'm sure you did. But why fight a duel then?

HILARY: Because he couldn't be bothered to write me a letter, and was too mean to send me roses.

CHARLES: I don't understand.

HILARY: No, but the point is I do.

CHARLES: Well, I don't think you will get bored, and anyway I'm willing to chance it.

HILARY: Are you, Charles, are you? Victor, d'you remember Beulah?

VICTOR: She's not lost again, is she?

CHARLES: Who the hell is Beulah, and what's she got to do with it?

HILARY: Beulah is a doll belonging to Emma, whom she has loved devotedly for years. You can always tell how much a doll is loved by its state of dilapidation. Beulah is maimed and nearly bald, and over the years she's had a lot of trouble with her eyes. About two Christmases ago, Emma was given a new doll, and she christened her Angela. Angela had real hair you could permanently wave, if you wound her up at the back she could recite "Now I lay me down to sleep" when she was put to bed. And she was very beautiful. And the inevitable happened. Well, about

six months ago Emma had her tonsils out. As she was getting into the car to go to the hospital clutching the beloved Angela under her arm, she suddenly stopped dead and said, "Where's Beulah?" And she wouldn't go without her, do you remember, Victor? We searched for an hour and Beulah was eventually found in a summer house, damp, discarded, rather mouldy and covered in ants. We soaked her in Dettol, wrapped her in a towel, pinned a label to it saying "Emergency Ward" and Emma stopped crying. It's a commonplace, rather sad little story that must have happened to hundreds of children in hundreds of households. I'm sorry to have repeated it. Particularly as I'm old enough to know better.

CHARLES: And what happened to Angela?

HILARY: I'm ashamed to say (*she is very ashamed.*)—she was left behind. Face downwards—on the gravel.

VICTOR: If this story is supposed to illustrate what, I think, are your intentions, I must warn you I'm in no mood to be soaked in Dettol.

CHARLES: Well, I guess I pick my face out of the gravel, and leave by the same door I came in by.

HILARY: Oh, Charles! Dearest Charles, I'm so sorry. So deeply sorry. But when I saw Victor in this—this wounded state, I suddenly realised—no, not realised, remembered—I suddenly remembered how very much I loved him. I'd forgotten it for a whole week.

VICTOR: You should write it down on your shopping list.

HILARY: And I'm afraid I don't want to leave him, not for three months or even three hours. There it is.

CHARLES (*to Victor*): You were right, weren't you, and I guess you've proved your point.

VICTOR: About what?

CHARLES: Duelling and the divorce rate. You could never leave a husband who'd fought and been wounded for you, could you, Hilary?

[*She shakes her head.*]

Goddamit! I knew it! Why in hell didn't I miss you, what a sucker I've been—what a goddam sucker!

VICTOR: Now you mustn't say that, Charles.

HILARY: What are you doing, darling?

VICTOR: Ringing the bell.

HILARY: You can't do that, Sellars will be in bed, it's much too late.

VICTOR: No, no, he won't, he's much too over-excited to go to bed, besides he's tearing up his novel. As a matter of fact, Charles, I reckoned on your trying to miss me when you fired.

CHARLES: But I was absolutely certain I had.

VICTOR: So I took certain measures——

CHARLES: What exactly do you mean?

HILARY: What measures could you take?

VICTOR: Perhaps precaution is a better word.

[*Enter Sellars.*]

SELLARS: You rang, milord?

VICTOR: Yes, Sellars, I did.

SELLARS: Excuse my dressing gown, milady.

VICTOR: As you and I anticipated, Sellars, Mr. Delacro intended to miss me when he fired. He's a little put out and can't quite understand how I came to be wounded. You'd better tell him what actually happened.

SELLARS: I marked his lordship, sir.

CHARLES: Marked, what do you mean marked?

SELLARS: It's a technical term in duelling, when they

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used rapiers they used to say pinked. We reckoned what with the excitement and tension you'd be too preoccupied to notice, sir. I fired from the hip.

CHARLES: Do you mean to tell me——

SELLARS: That I shot his lordship. Oh, yes sir, on his instructions of course, sir.

HILARY: Victor, is this true?

VICTOR: Oh, yes, darling.

HILARY: And I thought it was all so romantic. Victor, I could kill you.

VICTOR: Sellars might well have saved you the trouble. He shot very poorly at the practice this morning, ask Hattie.

HILARY: Hattie? Do you mean to tell me she knows all about this?

VICTOR: Oh, yes, of course. What was the best you did, Sellars?

SELLARS: Three flower pots out of five, milord.

HILARY: Three flower pots out of five.

SELLARS: Will that be all, milord?

VICTOR: Yes, thank you. Goodnight, Sellars.

SELLARS: Goodnight, milord.

[He is interrupted by the entrance of Hattie, who wears a magnificent mink coat. Hilary sees her immediately.]

HATTIE: Victor, darling, how are you feeling now?

HILARY (*shouting*): Where'd you get that coat?

HATTIE: Someone gave it to me.

HILARY: What for?

HATTIE: To keep me warm, I suppose.

HILARY: Who gave it to you?

HATTIE (*ignoring this*): I've been dying to show it you. Aren't you jealous?

HILARY (*looking at Victor*): D'you know for a split second I was. I really was.

ACT TWO, SCENE TWO

HATTIE: Well, I can't blame you. Isn't the colour dreamy?

HILARY: Take it off.

HATTIE: D'you want to try it on?

HILARY: I have tried it on. Take it off.

HATTIE: I can't, darling, I haven't much on underneath.

HILARY: I couldn't care less, take it off.

HATTIE: I'll let you try it on in the morning.

HILARY: Take it off.

HATTIE: Really, darling, I can't.

HILARY (*picking up revolver*): I'm going to count three. One—two—What d'you do, just pull the trigger? (*Points at the window and fires, there is a smash of glass.*) Ah, yes, that's it, now then, for the last time, take it off.

HATTIE: I suppose this is what's called being frightened out of your skins. (*She lets the coat fall to the ground, and stands looking very attractive.*)

HILARY: Give it to me.

[*Hattie picks up the coat and hands it to her.*]

Dearest Charles, thank you, it's the most lovely coat I've ever seen, but I'm afraid I've got to return it to you. (*Handing it back.*)

HATTIE: I'm cold!

CHARLES (*handing her the coat*): Then I guess you'd better put this on again.

HATTIE (*in ecstasy*): Oh, Charles! Thank you. Isn't it gorgeous!

VICTOR: Useful too. (*He blows Hattie a kiss.*)

HATTIE: Oh, isn't it wonderful, I've got a mink. It just goes to show, doesn't it. Hil, darling, you must have looked lovely in it.

HILARY: Well, I liked it I must say, but it's a little too much for a housekeeper to wear mink.

HATTIE: What do you mean, housekeeper?

HILARY: That's my position here for a little while.

HATTIE: Thank you, Charles.

CHARLES: You're welcome, ma'am.

VICTOR: And so are you welcome, my darling.

[Hilary does a bob curtsey.]

HATTIE: Oh, well, if there's going to be curtseying—

[She curtseys to Charles, sinking right down to the floor.]

Curtain

THE
IMAGINARY INVALID

by
MOLIÈRE
adapted by
MILES MALLESON

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2

All applications to perform this play, whether by amateurs or professionals, must be made to Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, Strand, London, W.C.2. No performance may take place unless a licence has previously been obtained.

CHARACTERS

ARGAN, *a hypochondriac*

ANGELICA, *his daughter*

LOUISE, *his younger daughter*

BÉLINE, *his second wife*

BÉRALDE, *his brother*

TOINETTE, *his maidservant*

DR. DIAFORUS, *a physician*

THOMAS DIAFORUS, *son of Dr. Diaforus*

DR. PURGON, *a physician*

AN APOTHECARY

MONSIEUR BONNEFOY, *a lawyer*

CLÉANTE, *in love with Angelica*

Paris: 1674

The action takes place in Monsieur Argan's sitting room.

ACT ONE

Monsieur Argan's sitting-room, Paris 1674. On the audience's right, a door to the rest of the house; left a door into his bedroom. In the middle of the room in an immense chair, alone, is Monsieur Argan himself. He is in a great dressing gown and surrounded by pillows, cushions and rugs. Beside him is a small table and he is busied with a great sheaf of papers—obviously doing some sums of addition. He has a large quill pen; counters; a contraption to help him with the sums—beads threaded on wires; and he uses his fingers. Even so he adds with difficulty. He puts aside one piece of paper and picks up another from the great pile of them on the table.

ARGAN (*reading*): “A statement of accounts, due, from Monsieur Argan to Monsieur Fleurant apothecary. (*Throws it aside and picks up another.*)—due to Monsieur Fleurant apothecary . . . (*and another*) Monsieur Fleurant . . . Monsieur Fleurant.” Aaah! Bills, Bills, Bills!! Like Leaves in Autumn! But not half so easy to get rid of . . . like falling leaves, you clear 'em up; turn your back—and there they are again! . . . I don't know which is worse—adding 'em up, or paying 'em. But if I don't go through 'em for myself, then I get cheated . . . a bit added on here, another there—shameless. I don't know what the world's coming to. No honesty left! Oh well—here we go! (*Selects another bill. Picks up quill, dips, and starts.*) Two—and two—make four. All right so far!! And five makes nine. (*But he checks that with fingers or counters, or beads, or all three.*) Yes. (*Writes.*) . . . and seven, and eight make thirteen. (*Checks it.*) No. Fifteen. Oh well, a mistake on the right side—make it eleven! Oh! Here's a much larger one. Now what's all this about? (*Reads.*) “For Monsieur Argan. A special mixture, Smooth and Insinuating to Encourage Sweeten and Humour the Digestive

ACT ONE

Processes." Oh, very well put! Such delicacy! That's what I like about my apothecary—his bills are so well worded. So discreet! "To Encourage, Sweeten and Humour"—Beautiful! 'Pon my word, almost Poetic! . . . Hey, what's this—*Forty Francs!* Oh *no*, Master Apothecary! That won't do! That won't do at all! You can put it into verse, for all I care, but that's no reason for over-charging like this. *Forty Francs* indeed!—It may encourage my digestive processes; but it enrages *me*! Besides, it wasn't half as encouraging and humorous as you thought. Not half. So halve it. *Twenty Francs.* (*Scratches out and re-writes.*) And that's generous! And here's another! (*He reads.*) . . . "A Juleep Soporific, Narcotic and Somniferous". What was that for? (*He reads again.*) "To induce deep sleep". . . . Um, I wonder whether it did. . . . (*He puts it aside, and picks up another: looks at it for a moment.*) Now, what was this? Why did I take this? What *could* it have been for?? (*Reads.*) "Five ounces of Cascara, two pints of Senna Pods, in a Syrup of Fresh Figs." (*He puzzles over it, for a moment; then suddenly:*) OOh! Yes!!! Of course! And I never slept a wink. (*He tears up the two bills.*) They cancel out! I'll pay nothing for that little lot! . . . (*Discouraged, he fingers through another pile.*) *Fifteen Francs; seventeen; twenty-six; forty-two!!* . . . Oh *no*, Master Apothecary, this is beyond a joke! . . . I mean, if you go on like this—who can afford to be ill . . . and where would *you* be then? That's what I'd like to know. Out of business!—and you'd deserve to be. (*He goes through another pile.*) "On the 24th, a Mixture for my Blood; on the 25th for my Heart; 26th for the Kidneys; 27th for the Wind; the 30th for my Nerves. Ridiculous! What's wrong with my Nerves, I'd like to know! (*Picks up another pile.*) Aah!!! Now, let's

see! . . . This month, I've had—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, different Medicines; and twelve Treatments . . . last month I had twelve different Medicines, and Fifteen Treatments. No wonder I'm not so well now as I have been. . . . I must see the doctor about this. (*He picks up and rings a bell. But it is a very small bell, and makes a ridiculously small "tinkle".*) . . . better have him sent for at once.

[*He tinkles the little bell again; but without effect.*]

Dam' silly little bell—doesn't make a sound. (*He shakes it again; more violently—tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.*) They only give it to me so they can't hear it. (*More violently—tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.*) Not that they'd come if they did.

[*Now each time he rings, it is more and more violently and furiously, until it is to the limit of his strength.*]

I might be dying for all they know! (*Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.*) I rather believe I *am*! (*Tinkle, tinkle, tinkle.*) I could easily die of rage!!!

[*He suddenly gives an ear-splitting yell of uncontrollable anger, and hurls the little bell away from him; and collapses, panting, into the depths of his great chair. . . . His panting dies into silence, and for a moment he lies there quite still . . . then he begins to stir into life again; struggles into a half-sitting position and looks round—the offending little bell is hopelessly out of reach! . . . So he calls out; but very, very feebly; indeed only just audibly.*]

. . . hullo. . . . (*He struggles up a bit more, and calls a bit louder.*) Hullo! . . . (*And suddenly sits bolt upright and lets out a stentorian bellow.*) HULLO!!!!

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[*In the distance, but so it can be clearly heard, a female voice answers.*]

TOINETTE'S VOICE (*off*): Hullo?

ARGAN (*shouting*): Come quick. I'm dying!

TOINETTE'S VOICE: Dying?!

ARGAN: When I can get my hands on you, I'll give you what for!

TOINETTE'S VOICE: What for?

ARGAN: Stop talking like an Echo; and come here!

. . . Can you hear me?

TOINETTE'S VOICE: No!

ARGAN: Aaaah!!! . . . Come here, come here, come here. Drop whatever you're doing, and come here—

[*There is the most terrific crash; a scream; some horrible bumping sounds; and a noise as if all the china in the house were being smashed. . . . Toinette, Argan's nurse, and his wife's maid—and a very amusing, wide-awake young woman she is—appears in the doorway; dishevelled, and with a large empty tray.*]

TOINETTE: Now look what you've made me do!

ARGAN: What?

TOINETTE: I've fallen downstairs.

ARGAN: Well—what of it?

TOINETTE: With your wife's breakfast tray. I've broken her cup; I've broken her saucer—and I've broken all the plates.

ARGAN (*grasping his stick*): You clumsy slut! Come here!

TOINETTE: I can't.

ARGAN: Why not?

TOINETTE: I've broken my ankle!

[*And she flops into a chair—at a safe distance from him and his stick.*]

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ARGAN: Broken your ankle! How can you look after me with a broken ankle?

TOINETTE: I can't.

ARGAN: Oh, you're a bad, wicked girl! And if I can't reach you with my stick, I can give you the rough edge of my tongue! Now, listen!—

[Upon which Toinette takes hold of her ankle, and sets up the most frightful howling.]

ARGAN (*yelling at her*): Will you be quiet?

[She goes on howling.]

ARGAN (*he goes on yelling*): Stop it! Will you stop it!! I can't hear myself speak.

[He stops speaking and immediately she stops howling; so there is a sudden silence.]

ARGAN: How can I scold you, if you make that row?!

TOINETTE: Scold me! When I've half killed myself, obeying you!

ARGAN: Obeying me! Did I tell you to break your ankle? Now listen!—

[Again she starts howling, and again he yells at her.]

ARGAN: Stop it!! . . . Will you stop it! . . . St. . . . (*But he suddenly clutches at his throat; and again for the moment he is silent, so is she. Whispering:*) I think you've given me Laryngitis!

TOINETTE: Then we're quits!

ARGAN: *Quits!*? What d'you mean?

TOINETTE: You've got laryngitis, I've broken my ankle; you want to scold—you're scolding; I want

ACT ONE

to cry—I'm crying. And if that isn't fair, what is?!
ARGAN (*in his ordinary voice*): Don't argue; it makes my head ache. Clear these things away. (*Indicating the bills.*)

[*Toinette gets up and walks to the table.*]

ARGAN: I thought you'd broken your ankle.

TOINETTE: I've mended it.

ARGAN: You couldn't.

TOINETTE: Oh yes, I could. It's cured—like your laryngitis!! . . .

[*She sees the litter on the table.*]

Ooh, what a mess! What is it?

ARGAN: Mind your own business!

[*Toinette picks up a bill.*]

ARGAN (*shouting*): *Don't touch 'em!*

[*Toinette throws it down, as if it had stung her.*]

TOINETTE: How can I clear 'em up without touching 'em?!

ARGAN: Um? . . . Put the table over there; as it is; I'll go on with 'em tomorrow.

[*Toinette carries the table across the room, and as she does so, observes what's on it.*]

TOINETTE: Oh! From your Apothecary . . . all of 'em . . . bills . . . he's a nice one! And doing himself proud over you! And that doctor of yours! A pretty pair! And you, too! The three of you! . . .

The things you get up to with that poor inside of yours!

ARGAN: You leave my inside alone.

TOINETTE: I wish *you* would! You'd be a different man!

ARGAN: Don't show your ignorance, girl! My Apothecary's the best in Paris; and my Doctor is a man of great skill, and great Learning—what he doesn't know about Illnesses——

TOINETTE: I agree with you there! He smells 'em out, where nobody else would think of 'em.

ARGAN (*pleased*): That's true; that's very true.

TOINETTE: Why, if it wasn't for him you wouldn't know you were ill.

ARGAN: That's true, that's—What are you talking about! Of course I should be ill, but I shouldn't know what *of*!!!

TOINETTE: What would that matter?

ARGAN: When I spoke of an Illness, I shouldn't know what to call it!

TOINETTE: Oh, your Illnesses! They're all your little darlings, aren't they? With their own pet names (*She waves an arm at the row of bottles.*)—and each with a little bottle of its own—and when they're thirsty you give 'em drinks!

ARGAN: May you be forgiven! With all I have to suffer, I think this lack of sympathy is the hardest to bear!

[*He sinks his head in his hands. . . . The door opens, cautiously, just enough to let in a very attractive head—that of Angelica, Argan's daughter. . . . Argan lifts his head from his hands, and, as he does so, the head at the door disappears, and the door closes again.*]

ARGAN: Where's my daughter?

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TOINETTE (*who has seen her in the doorway*): How should I know! I haven't the slightest idea.

ARGAN: Go and find her; and send her to me; I want to talk to her.

[*Toinette crosses the room, and disappears out of the door . . . but reappears immediately.*]

TOINETTE: She was just coming! (*As she re-crosses the room.*) A loving daughter always knows when her father wants her. You don't deserve such a daughter.

[*Angelica appears in the doorway.*]

ARGAN: Oh, there you are! Come in! I want to talk to you.

ANGELICA: Yes, father.

[*She comes into the room.*]

ARGAN: Sit down.

ANGELICA: Yes, father.

[*And very demurely she sits . . . there is a pause.*]

(*When she can bear it no longer, but still very demure.*)

What is it you want to see me about?

ARGAN: All in good time, all in good time; don't hurry me. . . . Are you comfortable?

ANGELICA: Yes, thank you, yes.

ARGAN: Well, I'm not!!

[*He throws off his rugs, gets up and hurries towards his bed-room door; as he goes.*]

Back in a minute.

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

[*And he disappears.*]

TOINETTE: A minute!! He's an optimist!

[*As soon as ever her father is out of the way, the demure Angelica is transformed. She hurries across the room to Toinette and speaks in a kind of intriguing, childish ecstasy!*]

ANGELICA: Oh, Toinette!!!!

[*But Toinette, catching this change of tone, and as she is constantly "putting on an act" of some sort, out of her own high spirits, now decides to tease Angelica; so turning her back on her, she makes as if she were busy, tidying up the bills on Argan's table.*]

TOINETTE: Yes, Miss Angelica, what is it?

ANGELICA: Oh Toinette! Toinette!!

TOINETTE: What's all this about?

ANGELICA (*repeating*): Toinette!!!!

TOINETTE: I heard! And what d'you want with me?

ANGELICA: Oh *dear* Toinette!

TOINETTE: Oh! So now I'm "dear"——

ANGELICA: Turn round and look at me!

[*Toinette turns round to her.*]

TOINETTE: I'm looking!

ANGELICA: Can't you guess?

TOINETTE: Guess what?

ANGELICA: Why, what I want to say, and talk about.

TOINETTE: Considering we've been talking about nothing else for the past week, I've got a fair idea!

ANGELICA: Well, why don't you begin?

TOINETTE: Begin! Me begin? How can I begin, when you never stop?

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ANGELICA: Oh Toinette!—he's so *Handsome!* So *Wonderful* to look at!!

[*Angelica's ecstasy, her young love is so genuine and so deeply-felt that it should be revealing and touching as well as amusing. But Toinette—still putting on her act—pretends to be dumb; and doesn't answer. So Angelica adds sharply:*]

ANGELICA: *Isn't he??*

TOINETTE (*immediately reacting as if the words were jolted out of her*): Oh yes! Yes; *he is!*

ANGELICA: And his Manners! Such Perfect Manners! Oh, but they're exquisite.

[*Again no answer from Toinette, so again violently:*]

Aren't they?

TOINETTE (*again jumping to it in sudden violent agreement*): Oh yes. Yes, *they are!*

ANGELICA: And his Bearing! The way he holds himself! With such a Manly Grace!—*Don't you agree?!*

TOINETTE: Yes, yes, *I do!*

ANGELICA: He's Every Inch a Splendid Gentleman! . . . *Toinette!*

TOINETTE: Yes?

ANGELICA: What d'you say?

TOINETTE: Yes.

ANGELICA: Yes what?

TOINETTE: Every Inch??

ANGELICA: Noble! He's *Noble!* That's the only word—you can't deny it . . . *Can you??*

TOINETTE: No, I can't.

ANGELICA: And *Passionate!!*

TOINETTE (*taking real interest*): *Eh??*

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ANGELICA: Oh, if you only knew!

TOINETTE (*impatiently*): Well, go on, tell me.

ANGELICA: And with it all, so *gentle*; and so *self-controlled*.

TOINETTE (*disappointed*): In fact, nothing to tell.

ANGELICA: And don't you think our meeting was *ordained*?

TOINETTE (*puzzled*): Ordained?!

ANGELICA: No. *Pre-ordained*. Arranged in Heaven—sometime just after the Creation! Set down, indelibly, in the Divine Diary!—"On such and such a day in 1674, Angelica meets Cléante"! . . . What do you think?

TOINETTE (*rather doubtfully*): I suppose it *could* have been!

ANGELICA: But Toinette—the *one* evening in the whole year when I go out to the theatre with my Aunt—that *he* should be there; and in the next Box to us; and think of such a wonderful excuse to come and introduce himself.

TOINETTE: Yes, he's got his wits about him, I grant you that.

ANGELICA: And isn't it *maddening*, being kept so close, and under such restraint, that I can only see him, here and there, and every now and again!

TOINETTE (*thawing again*): Oh there, dear Mistress, I agree with you—it must be *maddening*!

ANGELICA (*encouraged by the thaw, and becoming confidential*): And, dear Toinette, now tell me: D'you think he loves me, as he says he does?

TOINETTE: Aah!!! Now you're asking!

ANGELICA: What do you mean by that?

TOINETTE: In matters of love, all men are much the same!

ANGELICA: How can they be!?

TOINETTE: They are! When a man makes love—

ACT ONE

whatever kind of man, and in whatever way—why, then, as the Philosophers say, Appearance and Reality are hard to tell apart!——

ANGELICA (*starting to interrupt*): Yes, but——

TOINETTE (*overwhelming her*): Take this from me: in the playing of love scenes, there are more good actors off the stage than on!

ANGELICA (*protesting*): Oh No, Toinette, oh No! If you look close—if you look *very* close—you can tell the difference.

TOINETTE: You pretty Innocence! The closer you look, the more your eyes are dazzled.

ANGELICA: Then how can you tell?

TOINETTE: You can't. Till it's too late. Who cares? I love good acting.

ANGELICA: You're wrong, and I can prove it.

TOINETTE: How?

ANGELICA: I've had a letter from him.

TOINETTE: Is he more convincing with his pen than with his tongue?

ANGELICA: No: but he told me in his letter, he was going to ask my father for his consent—so we can get married.

TOINETTE (*dropping all pretence at teasing, and embracing her*): Oh my dear Mistress, I'm so happy for you. Isn't that wonderful! And you heard? Your father has something special to say to you.

ANGELICA: Of course I heard! Can it be that?

TOINETTE: What else?

ANGELICA: Oh Toinette! Darling, dear Toinette—How does one live through minutes when one's whole life hangs in a balance? If Cléante has asked him——

TOINETTE: —but of course he has——

ANGELICA: —what will my father say? Another moment of this suspense, and I shall die!

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

TOINETTE: I hear him coming back. You won't have long to wait. And let's be nice to him!

ANGELICA: Yes. Very, very nice!

[Argan appears in his doorway. The two girls rush to each side of him.]

ANGELICA: Darling Father!

TOINETTE: Oh my dear Master!

ARGAN (*quite taken by surprise*): Eh!? What's all this about??

TOINETTE: How are you feeling now?

ARGAN: Weak. Very weak—What's left of me!

TOINETTE: Come and sit down.

ANGELICA: Let me help you.

TOINETTE: Lean on me.

ANGELICA: And me!

[In their eagerness to get him back into his chair, they almost drag him across the room.]

ARGAN: Hi! Not so fast! What's all this hurry!

[So the girls slow up a little.]

TOINETTE (*with great concern*): That's right. Gently does it!

ANGELICA: Careful!!

[And so they reach his great chair.]

TOINETTE (*lowering him into it*): Hold on to me.

ANGELICA: And me.

[He gets into the chair. . . . The girls continue to fuss over him.]

ACT ONE

TOINETTE: Let's make you comfortable.

ANGELICA (*with a rug*): Put this over you.

TOINETTE: To keep you warm.

ANGELICA: Now let's tuck you in.

TOINETTE (*putting a cushion under his arm*): This for your arm.

ANGELICA (*doing the same*): This for the other one.

TOINETTE: This for your head!

ANGELICA: Another for your feet!

ARGAN (*when he has been made thus comfortable*): Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear—I really must have a rest. . . . I think I'll take a nap!

ANGELICA (*horrified*): A nap!!

ARGAN (*repeating*): A nap!

[*And he closes his eyes. The two girls regard each other, over him, in sudden despair.*]

TOINETTE: We've overdone it!

ANGELICA: I shall go mad!

ARGAN: I can't have you chattering here. Be off—the two of you.

ANGELICA: But father—you're not going to sleep?!

ARGAN: That's the idea!

TOINETTE: You can't!

ARGAN: Can't I—When you clear out, I'll have a dam' good try!

TOINETTE: But you *mustn't*!

ARGAN: *Mustn't*!! And why not pray?

TOINETTE: The doctor said so!

ARGAN (*opening his eyes, and taking notice*): The Doctor??

TOINETTE: He said you weren't to sleep in the day time. . . . And, especially, not when you wanted to!

ARGAN: But *why*?

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

TOINETTE: It's very *dangerous*.

ARGAN: Dangerous?? . . . How?

TOINETTE: You might never wake up.

ARGAN (*horrified*): Never wake up!!

TOINETTE: That's what the Doctor said. . . . I heard him telling you.

ARGAN: I don't remember.

TOINETTE (*apparently in a great state*): Oh you poor Man! Oh, Miss Angelica, your poor dear father!—His memory's going!

ARGAN: Eh!?

TOINETTE: Now, don't be frightened. Try and sit up a bit!

[*And she drags him up into a sitting position.*]

ANGELICA: Father, you had something to say to me.

ARGAN (*getting confused*): Something to say to you?

TOINETTE: Yes. Something important. What was it?

ARGAN (*becomes terrified; to Angelica*): She's quite right. My Memory's going. I can't remember.

TOINETTE: God help us all!

ANGELICA: But you sent for me.

ARGAN: I sent for you.

ANGELICA: Yes.

ARGAN (*he stares at his daughter for a moment. Then, suddenly*): Oh yes! I've got it! Thank God, it's all come back. Of course, of course! Oh, what a fright you gave me.

ANGELICA: Father! . . . Well!

ARGAN: Yes . . . I've news for you.

ANGELICA (*hardly able to gasp out the word*): News???

ARGAN: You have been asked in marriage.

[*For the moment Angelica can't speak; it's all she can do to prevent herself shouting for joy.*]

ACT ONE

TOINETTE: No! . . . Well! . . . Who'd have thought it. Oh no. I don't believe it, you're making it up.

ARGAN (*livid; shouting at her*): I'm *not* making it up.

ANGELICA: Asked in marriage! (*And out of sheer relief and joy, she breaks into a laugh.*)

ARGAN: You laugh! You like the idea. Find it amusing! Oh Well, you're growing up—it's only natural. So you're pleased.

ANGELICA: Father, even if I wasn't, I'm your daughter, I should obey you.

ARGAN: I should hope so! I'd see to that! Still, I'm glad you're pleased. It makes it easier for me.

TOINETTE: For *you*?

ARGAN (*to Angelica*): Your step-mother was against it; wanted to make a Nun of you.

ANGELICA: A Nun?

ARGAN: —send you to a Convent. You, and your little sister!

ANGELICA: But why?

TOINETTE (*knowingly*): No doubt she had her reasons.

ARGAN: But I put my foot down. And to stop all argument, and such unpleasantness, I've arranged to have you married as soon as possible.

TOINETTE: Oh dear Monsieur Argan, this is the best, the wisest thing you've ever done! Oh, I'm so proud of you! Now, what can I do for you—what about a little drop of medicine!

ARGAN: Medicine! Why?

TOINETTE: To celebrate.

ARGAN: Which?

TOINETTE: The nastiest!

ARGAN: Eh?

TOINETTE: You always say that does you the most good.

ANGELICA: No. Give him the nicest—and a double dose! Oh, father—I'm so grateful.

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ARGAN: So you ought to be! Well, that's all settled. I haven't seen the lad, but from what I'm told, when you set eyes on him, you'll be well satisfied.

ANGELICA (*thoughtlessly*): Oh, yes, I shall! I shall!

[*At which Toinette begins to make violent signs of caution to her, behind Argan's back.*]

ARGAN: You seem very certain! How can you be so sure? (*Then he catches the signs, and looks from one to the other of the girls.*) What's all this? What's going on? . . . And now, young lady, perhaps you'll tell me why you're so sure you'll be "well-satisfied".

ANGELICA (*haltingly*): . . . Well . . . you see, father it's like this. . . . Recently—and quite by chance—we met.

ARGAN: You've met??

TOINETTE: In company.

ARGAN: Hold your tongue! . . . What happened?

ANGELICA: Nothing!

ARGAN: Nothing?

ANGELICA: We looked at one another.

ARGAN: Didn't you speak? Did neither say a word?

ANGELICA: Only a very few.

ARGAN: What kind of words.

ANGELICA: A greeting, and goodbye.

ARGAN: I see no harm in that. I'm glad you liked the look of him. They say he's handsome.

ANGELICA (*ecstatic again*): I've never seen a man who's half so handsome!

ARGAN: And clever with it.

ANGELICA: I've never known a man who's half so clever!

ARGAN: He seems to have made an impression! But for once you're right. He must be clever to talk Latin and Greek.

ACT ONE

ANGELICA: Latin and Greek!!

ARGAN: Yes.

ANGELICA: He never told me that.

ARGAN: You surprise me! You meet—in company; look at one another; say a few words—and he never told you he spoke Latin and Greek! Still, you might have guessed.

ANGELICA: Guessed?

ARGAN: If he's to take his Doctor's Degree in a few days—he *must* know Latin and Greek.

ANGELICA: Doctor's Degree?

ARGAN: Yes.

ANGELICA: In a few days?

ARGAN: Yes.

ANGELICA: Father—are you sure?

ARGAN: Of course I am!

ANGELICA: But how do you know? Who told you?

ARGAN: My doctor. Doctor Purgon.

ANGELICA: Doctor Purgon! Does Doctor Purgon know him?

ARGAN: Don't be so silly! What a ridiculous question. "Does Doctor Purgon know him!" Not know his own nephew!

ANGELICA: Nephew! Cléante—Doctor Purgon's nephew.

ARGAN: *Cléante*? Who's Cléante, if you please. Cléante, Cléante, Cléante!! Never heard of him. I'm talking of the man you're going to marry.

ANGELICA: And so am I.

TOINETTE: I knew it! You're not talking of the same young man.

ARGAN: Oh, yes I am!

TOINETTE: But *who*?! Who are you talking of?

ARGAN: Why—young Thomas Diaforus. Son of the great Doctor Diaforus.

ANGELICA: Oh, *no*!!!!

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

TOINETTE: That young Booby!

ARGAN: BOOBY??

TOINETTE: *BOOBY!!!*

ARGAN (*yelling at her again*): Will you be quiet!

TOINETTE: And let you play havoc with your daughter's life! Not me.

ARGAN: Not you, indeed!! And what's it got to do with you? Answer me that! No. Don't. I'll not argue with you. I'll not demean myself. I'll not say a word to you. Not a single word.

TOINETTE: But you can listen.

ARGAN: Listen. I won't.

TOINETTE: You can't help it. You're not deaf. Not yet.

ARGAN: Aren't I? We'll see about that! (*He claps his hands over his ears.*) Now you can talk your head off!

TOINETTE: Oh, Monsieur Argan! *Dear* Monsieur Argan!

ARGAN: I can't hear a word you're saying!—And don't call me dear!

TOINETTE: Oh, he's impossible! The silly old idiot.

ARGAN (*taking his hands from his ears—livid with rage*): Silly old idiot!!?

TOINETTE (*overwhelming him*): What possessed you to arrange this senseless marriage!

ARGAN: Senseless! I've never done anything so sensible in all my life! And I'll tell you why—No, I won't; I'm not talking to you. But I'll tell my daughter. (*He turns to Angelica.*) Daughter! If there's any compassion in you, any pity, you'll understand. I'm a sick man. God knows I do my best to bear my ill-health; but I need attention. Constant attention. By this marriage I shall have a Doctor in the family. And his father a Doctor; and his Uncle. Three Doctors. And they won't want paying—or at least half-price!

ACT ONE

TOINETTE: So you'd sacrifice your daughter.

ARGAN: Sacrifice! Oh, what a *little* Mind you've got. What Meanness of spirit. Are you quite incapable of taking a larger view—I'm giving her the chance to be Unselfish; to behave nobly—with all the rewards of that; in this world and the next.

TOINETTE: And you not even ill.

ARGAN: Can I believe my ears! *Me!* Not ill?!!

TOINETTE: What's wrong with you?

ARGAN: Wrong! Everything! I'm wrong from head to feet.

TOINETTE: I don't know about your feet; but I agree about your head. There's something wrong with that!

ARGAN: I shall have a stroke.

TOINETTE: No, don't; not till this is settled. . . . All right, all right—you're ill.

ARGAN: Yes.

TOINETTE: Very ill.

ARGAN: Yes. Very.

TOINETTE: On your last legs.

ARGAN: Eh!

TOINETTE: You can't last much longer.

ARGAN: Hey!

TOINETTE: So when you're dead and buried, what good is it going to do your daughter to be married to a doctor?

ARGAN (*to Angelica*): Don't listen to her! This is a good marriage! Young Thomas is an only son; his mother's dead; he'll inherit his father's money; and old Diaforus is the richest and most influential doctor in all Paris; last year he made twenty thousand Crowns.

TOINETTE: He must have killed an awful lot of people to have made all that!

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

[*Angelica suddenly bursts into tears, and makes her way out of the room, sobbing.*]

ARGAN (*violently to Toinette*): Now see what you've done! Have you *no* consideration for your mistress, and my daughter.

TOINETTE (*with superb and calculated impertinence*): Now we're alone, I can say this to you; you can put this marriage right out of your head!

ARGAN: How *dare* you!

TOINETTE: She'll never marry him.

ARGAN: Oh, yes she will. She'll *have* to!

TOINETTE: *Have* to?

ARGAN: Of course she will, or else——

TOINETTE: Else what?

ARGAN: I'll do as my wife has always wanted, and she'll be in a Convent before she can turn round.

TOINETTE: You couldn't do that!

ARGAN: Who'd stop me?

TOINETTE: You'd stop yourself. You wouldn't have the heart!

ARGAN: You don't know me!

TOINETTE: Oh, yes I do; and strange as it may seem, I don't think you're really a Bad Man!

ARGAN: Eh!

TOINETTE: You're very silly.

ARGAN: Ah!!

TOINETTE: And you're difficult.

ARGAN: Um?

TOINETTE: But you're not wicked and cruel.

ARGAN (*in a rage*): I *am* wicked and cruel! What am I saying! Get out! Out of my sight——

[*Quite unruffled, Toinette makes her way calmly to the door; there she turns.*]

ACT ONE

TOINETTE: And I'll tell you something more—if she obeys you, I'll disinherit her.

ARGAN: Disinherit?

TOINETTE: Yes.

ARGAN: What have you got to leave?

TOINETTE: Nothing, and she won't get a penny of it!

[Beside himself with rage, Argan flings one of his cushions at her; but with a laugh she disappears through the door. Argan flings a second cushion after her which hits his wife, Béline, as she enters; and who gives a squeal of surprise at this unexpected reception; seeing who it is Argan stumbles across the room into her arms.]

ARGAN: Oh, wife, wife, wife——

BÉLINE: Husband!——

ARGAN: My dear!

BÉLINE: My love!

ARGAN: Sweetheart!——

BÉLINE: Pettikins!! . . . What is it? What's the matter?

ARGAN: It's *her*!

BÉLINE: Who?

ARGAN: Toinette.

BÉLINE: Toinette?

ARGAN: Yes.

BÉLINE: What's she been doing?

ARGAN: Nothing.

BÉLINE: Nothing?

ARGAN: She does everything I don't want; nothing that I do.

BÉLINE: That's bad.

ARGAN: It's worse. She keeps on telling me that I'm not ill!!

BÉLINE: Oh, that's ridiculous.

ARGAN: Yes, it is. Isn't it?

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

BÉLINE: Of course it is.

ARGAN: Oh, thank God for you. What should I do without you? You're such a comfort! But I tell you this—if she goes on telling me there's nothing the matter with me, it'll be the death of me.

BÉLINE: I'll speak to her. (*She calls.*) Toinette! (*No answer. Again.*) Toinette!!

TOINETTE'S VOICE (*off*): Madame!

BÉLINE: Come here.

ARGAN (*as he returns to his chair*): You *will* get rid of her.

BÉLINE: Well—we'll see.

ARGAN: No. Send her away at once.

BÉLINE: But servants are hard to come by. They're so scarce, and they're in such demand, they can behave exactly as they like—and make their own terms.

ARGAN: Shocking state of affairs! I don't know what the world's coming to!

BÉLINE: But we've got to live in it. . . . Of course I *could* send her away.

ARGAN: Yes. Yes, you must.

BÉLINE: But of course then you'd have no one to look after you!

ARGAN (*horrified*): No one to look after me.

BÉLINE: You'd have to look after yourself!

ARGAN: I couldn't do that!!

BÉLINE: Well—there you are!

[*Toinette appears in the doorway.*]

TOINETTE: Madame called?

BÉLINE (*going to her*): Now what's all this about?

TOINETTE (*wide-eyed innocence; butter wouldn't melt in her mouth*): Madame? What's what about?

BÉLINE: You've upset your Master.

TOINETTE: Upset the Master?

ACT ONE

BÉLINE: Yes.

TOINETTE: *Me?*!

BÉLINE: Yes, you!

TOINETTE: Oh, no, there's some mistake. It was the breakfast tray.

BÉLINE: He's very angry.

TOINETTE (*becoming tearful*): I don't know why he should be. I do my best for him.

ARGAN (*from his chair; cupping his ear with his hand, towards her*): What's she say? I can't hear! I bet she's telling a whole lot of lies.

TOINETTE: He's been in one of his moods.

BÉLINE: But what's been happening?

ARGAN: Speak up, girl; speak up!

TOINETTE (*moving nearer Béline, and deliberately dropping her voice*): Well, first . . . he told me how he intended to give his eldest daughter in marriage to young Thomas, son of the great Doctor Diaforus.

BÉLINE: Yes? . . .

TOINETTE: And I also ventured to say I thought it would be better to send her to a Convent.

BÉLINE: What did he say to that?

TOINETTE: He didn't like it. And when I reminded him that that was what you wanted, he flew into a rage.

ARGAN: What's she saying?

BÉLINE: That she's very sorry, Pettikins; and she'll never be rude to you again.

ARGAN: I'm glad to hear it. Never—not till the next time.

BÉLINE (*returning to him*): Now don't be naughty . . . oh, you *are* in a pickle! Let's straighten you out a bit. . . . (*She arranges his rug over him.*) And look at your Night Cap!

ARGAN: I can't! I haven't got eyes in the top of my head.

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

BÉLINE: Put it on properly. Pull it down over your forehead. . . . Further. . . . Further.

[*He pulls it down, so that it is over his ears.*]

BÉLINE: That's better. . . . It's the way to catch a cold—letting the air in through the ears. . . . (*She picks up one of the cushions he has thrown on the floor.*) Sit up a moment. (*He does and she puts it behind his back.*) There! That to keep your back comfortable. . . . (*She puts something over his legs.*) That to keep your feet warm. (*She turns away from him to pick up something else.*)

TOINETTE (*who has picked up the second cushion he threw, now puts it over his face.*) And this to keep your mouth shut.

[*And she runs from the room. Argan leaps up with a yell.*]

BÉLINE: What is it now?

ARGAN (*pointing after Toinette*): She wants to kill me!

BÉLINE: Kill you?

ARGAN: Suffocate me! Smother me to death!

BÉLINE: You mustn't let yourself get so excited. It's very bad for you.

ARGAN: Yes. Yes—it is.

BÉLINE: You haven't the strength.

ARGAN: No, no—I haven't.

BÉLINE: A great baby—that's what you are; throwing your things about! (*Making him comfortable again.*) But what a darling baby.

ARGAN: Oh, my dear love—you're very good to me. What can I do for you?

BÉLINE: Nothing. Just be yourself. There's nothing I want from you other than that. And well you know it. . . . Don't you?

ARGAN: Yes. Yes. I do.

ACT ONE

BÉLINE: And you're not to worry.

ARGAN: No.

BÉLINE: Not about anything.

ARGAN: No.

BÉLINE: Not about Toinette; nor Angelica; nor little Louise; and above all, my precious, you're not to worry about me.

ARGAN: About you! But why should I worry about you?

BÉLINE: And especially, my darling husband, I'm anxious you should never worry your poor dear head again, not ever again, over what we were talking of last night.

ARGAN (*becoming disturbed*): Last night! What were we talking of last night?

BÉLINE: There. You've forgotten already—thank heaven for that.

ARGAN (*more and more agitated*): No. You must remind me. You see, my memory's going! It frightens me. So you must tell me.

BÉLINE: No. Please don't ask me. I can't bear even to think about it.

ARGAN: That makes it worse! It must have been important.

BÉLINE: No. It wasn't—at least, not to me.

ARGAN: Was it to me?

BÉLINE: You seemed to think so.

ARGAN: Y'know you can die of losing your Memory. I had a friend went out of his mind; and went to his death, a screaming lunatic—it began like this; forgetting things! I must remember! I *must*! (*He is in a frantic state; and beats his head. Suddenly he stops, and looks up in a worse panic.*) I've forgotten what it is I'm trying to remember!

BÉLINE: It was only something that you said to me last night.

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ARGAN: But *what*?

BÉLINE: You said there *was* something that you *could* do for me.

ARGAN: Yes. Yes. Go on.

BÉLINE: I'd rather not.

ARGAN: Go on. . . .

BÉLINE: You said. . . . But never mind.

ARGAN: What did I say?

BÉLINE: You said you wanted to make a New Will—and leave everything to me.

ARGAN: Ah Yes!! Of course, of course—And I told you, you must find a clever lawyer—do you remember?—

BÉLINE: Yes.

ARGAN: And, my dear, you must; and some time soon.

BÉLINE: *I have!!*

ARGAN (*surprised*): Oh! You *have*! . . . Good . . . very good. . . . What did he say?

BÉLINE: I've brought him back with me!

ARGAN: You've brought him back!

BÉLINE: He's here!

ARGAN: Here? Where?

BÉLINE: Just outside the door!

ARGAN: Oh! . . . Bring him in.

[*Béline goes to the door, opens it, and speaks out of it.*]

BÉLINE: Monsieur Bonnefoy!

BONNEFOY'S VOICE (*off*): Madame!

BÉLINE: Please come in.

[*The Lawyer appears in the doorway.*]

ARGAN (*from his chair*): Come in, come in . . . very glad to see you. Good of you to come. Sit down.

ACT ONE

(*He does.*) Make yourself comfortable. My wife tells me you're a very clever lawyer.

[*Bonnefoy inclines his head; but Béline suddenly bursts into tears.*]

Good gracious me, my dear! What is it?

BÉLINE (*through her sobs*): It's unkind of you to force this on me.

ARGAN: Unkind!?

BONNEFOY: Dear lady, I appreciate your feelings; and so, without doubt, does your good man. But you must be brave. You must be unselfish. We're doing this for him. To put his mind at rest. An uneasy mind is the worst possible thing for an invalid.

ARGAN (*very much approving*): That's true; that's very true.

BONNEFOY: This is a painful subject. Even a lawyer has a heart, and realises that. But, for that very reason, I suggest the sooner we get this matter settled the better for all of us.

BÉLINE (*her sobs lessening*): Yes. Please settle it between you, as quickly as possible.

BONNEFOY: That's well said. (*He turns to Argan.*) Now, Monsieur Argan—this morning your wife called on me, and told me—very diffidently . . . if I may say so . . . but at the same time . . . if I may hazard a guess . . . interpreting your wishes very faithfully, that you desire to make a final Will, leaving everything to her.

[*Béline gives a sob; but pulls herself together.*]

ARGAN: Yes. That is so.

BONNEFOY: That raises a problem.

ARGAN: Eh?

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

BONNEFOY: You have, I understand, two daughters living, by a former marriage.

ARGAN: I have.

BONNEFOY: Now, while they are alive, and unless in some way they were to have renounced their rights, it isn't possible to make a Will, leaving everything to your Good Lady.

ARGAN: Isn't possible?? Why not?

BONNEFOY: It's against the Law.

ARGAN: I don't believe it. I want another opinion.

BÉLINE (*bursting into sobs again*): Oh, no, no, no—not another opinion. Things would drag on. If you can't leave me *anything*, what does it matter? I don't want your money, while I've got you; and when you go (*more sobbing*) I don't care what happens to me.

ARGAN (*distressed*): This is terrible.

BONNEFOY: If I may say so, Monsieur Argan, I think your wife unquestionably right. Another Opinion would inevitably mean that you would never be able to leave your money as you desire—all to your wife.

ARGAN: Outrageous!

BÉLINE: My love, never mind! What does it matter?

BONNEFOY: On the other hand——

ARGAN: Eh?

BONNEFOY: I'm here to help you, not to obstruct.

ARGAN: Go on!

BONNEFOY: In our profession, Monsieur, there are a Certain Few . . . whose Respect for the Law is quite immeasurable; whose Knowledge of it is Encyclopaedic—Men of Honour and Integrity——

BÉLINE (*tear-stained*): —of whom Monsieur Bonnefoy is one——

BONNEFOY (*inclining his head to her*): I thank you. (*Then continuing to Argan.*) For us, the Law is Sacred.

ACT ONE

Inviolable. Not to be touched—But it can be *Eluded!*

ARGAN: “*Eluded*”??!

BONNEFOY: Let me enlarge. When we are confronted with the Law’s Great Edifice—Majestic; Immovable—there, rising in front of us, across the very path that we, and some distinguished Client, may wish to Travel—do we run our heads against it? By no means! First we bow to show our Respect; then, find our way round, over, or under it.

ARGAN (*delighted—to his wife*): Right as usual, Sweetheart—A Great Lawyer.

BONNEFOY: Now to my point. Since you are unable—as I have explained—to leave all your money to your wife on your decease—Well, what of it? *You give it to her now!*

ARGAN (*taken aback*): Now?

BONNEFOY: A Deed of Gift.

ARGAN (*uncertainly*): A Deed of Gift! . . . This wants thinking over!

BONNEFOY (*producing some documents*): There is, I put it to you, nothing that wants thinking over. Nothing at all. You can proceed, if you prefer it so, step by step. You can give your wife now, if you care to, some trifling sum.

[*Argan grunts . . . and Béline whimpers.*]

—or a Considerable Sum.

[*Argan grunts more doubtfully; and Béline sobs.*]

Or Everything.

[*Argan grunts much more doubtfully; and Béline bursts into a flood of tears.*]

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

BÉLINE: Oh, No. No. No. It's more than I can bear. (*A crescendo of despair.*) I'd rather follow you into the next world, to care for you there, as I have done in this.

ARGAN: My dear love! (*To Bonnefoy.*) Did you ever hear anything like it!?

BONNEFOY: Never.

ARGAN: Isn't it extraordinary, the way she loves me.

BONNEFOY: Quite extraordinary!

ARGAN (*he begins to break down himself*): I find it deeply touching. Such utter devotion!! (*He begins to blubber.*)

BÉLINE (*clinging to him*): Dear husband.

ARGAN (*clinging to her*): Dear wife!

[*And they both break down and howl . . . Bonnefoy gets up, and walks about. . . . Then:*]

BONNEFOY: My dear good people. These tears are unreasonable. Such grief is premature. And please consider this:

[*They quieten themselves, and turn their tear-stained faces to him.*]

If the bare thought of death should be a cause for weeping, the Human Race would cry from Dawn to Night. And every living moment would be bathed in tears! . . . No. . . . We must keep Dry Eyes; Clear Heads; and make proper provision for the Future. Mourn when the time arrives; and not before; and not for too long after.

ARGAN (*to his wife*): This fellow's common-sense should shame the two of us. "Proper Provision". Yes. . . . Now, let me think. . . . In my bedroom, under the bed, in a locked box, I've twenty thousand francs.

ACT ONE

BÉLINE: No. No. I beg you, keep it. I'll not take it from you.—*How much did you say?*

ARGAN: Twenty thousand. And in the ward-robe are two bills payable to bearer.

BÉLINE: I couldn't bear to touch them. . . . *How much are they worth?*

ARGAN: One's for four thousand francs, the other for six. Come with me now. (*He begins to get out of his chair; they both help him.*) I'll show you where they are. . . . Bring your Documents. I'll sign the Deeds of Gift.

[*He disappears into his bedroom. Béline and Monsieur Bonnefoy following.*]

BONNEFOY (*as they go*): Congratulations!

BÉLINE: I'm in your debt.

BONNEFOY: We can arrange that later. . . .

[*They stop; and look at each other; he takes her hand—but Argan's voice breaks in.*]

ARGAN (*from the bedroom; shouting, impatient*): Hey, where have you got to! Come and help me with the ward-robe door!

Béline hurries towards the bedroom, followed by Bonnefoy . . . but before they have disappeared into it, the door opposite opens and Toinette appears, with Angelica behind her.

Then, as the bedroom door shuts, Toinette, first turning to Angelica, finger to lips, to enjoin silence, begins to tip-toe with the utmost caution across the room, Angelica following with equal caution. . . . When they are half-way towards the bedroom, the

Curtain Falls.

ACT TWO

When the curtain rises, Toinette is on her knees with her eye to the keyhole of the bed-room door. Angelica is beside her.

TOINETTE: Yes, it's the Lawyer. They're up to no good!

ANGELICA: Toinette, what am I to do?

TOINETTE: Ah, there you have me! It's no good pretending it's going to be easy for you. . . . You've got to go very carefully. They're both against you. Your father's obstinate; and your step-mother's much worse—she's clever.

ANGELICA: And so are you.

TOINETTE: Clever enough to see we're in a hole!

ANGELICA: Whatever happens, you'll do your best for me, you'll not leave me to myself.

TOINETTE: I'd rather die.

ANGELICA: I've an idea!

TOINETTE: What?

ANGELICA: We must let Cléante know.

TOINETTE: I have.

ANGELICA: What should I do without you.

TOINETTE: It's that step-mother of yours we've got to watch. I think I'll change my tactics. She's always trying to get me on her side. I'll pretend I am, and she may tell me things. I wish I knew what's going on in there! It's that shady lawyer, doing the talking—but I can't hear a word. These key-holes are useless; I don't know why they have them—I can't see a thing. . . . What are we to do? I can't go in, unless they call me.

ANGELICA: Why shouldn't I?

TOINETTE: Yes. You go in. (*She gets to her feet.*) Go in and kiss your father. Ask him how he is; smile at your step-mother, shake hands with the lawyer.

ACT TWO

Watch what they're doing; listen to all they say—and then come back and tell me. I'll wait here. . . .

[Angelica opens the door, slips into the room, and closes it after her. . . . Immediately Toinette drops on to her knees again to do her best at the key-hole. . . . In a few moments, the door opens! But Béline is standing in the open door-way. Toinette flops down on to all fours and makes a tremendous show of scrubbing the floor.]

BÉLINE (*full of suspicion*): What are you doing there?

TOINETTE: Trying to get the place clean, while the room's empty. This floor gets filthy. People *will* walk on it.

BÉLINE: Were you listening at the door?

TOINETTE (*outraged*): Me! Listening! Madame—what do you take me for? And why should I listen to the Master explaining all his Complaints to you—in detail! Inside and out. From top to bottom. I spend most of my life trying *not* to listen. Excuse me!

[And she continues to scrub the floor with even greater violence round Béline's feet. Béline, quite unconvinced, but finding nothing to say, moves to Argan's table, takes up a large Ink-Pot and the great Quill Pen, and carries them back into the room, shutting the door after her. Immediately, Toinette is back at the keyhole. . . . In at the door opposite appears a very conspiratorial-looking figure—a large hat well over his eyes, and a cloak held up to hide his face. Having got himself into the room, he crosses it very stealthily to touch Toinette on the shoulder. She turns; and, not unnaturally very nearly lets out a terrific yell; but manages to contain it into a squeal. . . . She scrambles away, and gets behind something.]

TOINETTE: In Heaven's name, who are you? What do you want? How did you get in?

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

THE FIGURE: It's *ME*!!

[*The Figure takes off his hat, and puts aside his cloak.*]

TOINETTE: You! Monsieur Cléante! You mustn't come here. You're mad!

CLÉANTE: I am. I got your message.

TOINETTE (*she is really in a state*): Heaven help us all. If you're seen—we're finished! They'd put her in a Convent straight away! Where would you be then?

CLÉANTE: In a Monastery.

TOINETTE: This is folly.

CLÉANTE: Listen!

TOINETTE: I'll listen some other time; not here. Not now. Get out!

CLÉANTE: But I'm *not* Cléante.

TOINETTE: Not Monsieur Cléante!

CLÉANTE: No.

TOINETTE: You *have* gone mad.

CLÉANTE: Yes. For I'm not myself. . . . And I don't love Angelica.

TOINETTE: Not love her! What are you saying! Oh, my poor Mistress.

CLÉANTE: I don't love her because I've never even seen her!

TOINETTE: Never *seen* her! Oh but you're *raving* mad!

CLÉANTE: I'm her Music Master.

TOINETTE: Music Master!

CLÉANTE: Actually, her Assistant Music Master.

TOINETTE: What *are* you talking about?

CLÉANTE: Her Music Master has been called out of Paris for a while; he asked me to take his place.

TOINETTE: Do you know him?

CLÉANTE: No. But if I had known him, he *would* have asked me.

ACT TWO

TOINETTE: You're a Cool One! . . . Someone's coming. . . . It's Monsieur Argan . . . keep out of his sight a moment, while I tell him who you are. . . . Pray God it works!!

[*Monsieur Argan appears from his bedroom.*]

Monsieur!—

[*Argan raises his hand in a rather mysterious and imperious gesture to command silence . . . then he commences to goose-step slowly and very deliberately, ponderously, and apparently purposefully across the room.*]

ARGAN (*as he thus proceeds*): My doctor told me to take twelve paces, up and down the room, three times a day; but I forgot to ask him which way—the length or breadth of it . . . silly of me . . . but I'll find out today. . . . Meanwhile, I'll take six across this way . . . six across that. . . .

[*Toinette stands watching him, but when he has gone a step past her, she shouts after him.*]

TOINETTE: Monsieur!

ARGAN (*caught with one leg in the air, and nearly falling over*): Aahhh! Don't shout like that! You startled me. You might have given me a heart attack! (*After another step, he continues his reproof.*) You ought to know better. Never speak loudly in a Sick Room. Keep your voice down. . . . Now I've lost count. I'd better begin again.

[*And he returns to the door and starts again . . . this time, when he reaches the same spot, just past her, she gives a kind of hissing whisper.*]

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

TOINETTE: Monsieur!

ARGAN (*stopping again*): Eh?

TOINETTE (*an almost inaudible whisper*): Monsieur.

ARGAN (*turning to her*): What is it now?

[*She continues to move her lips, as if speaking, but doesn't make a sound.*]

Eh? What is it?

[*Toinette continues.*]

Speak up, girl; I can't hear a word.

TOINETTE (*with a sudden shout that nearly makes him jump out of his skin*): Something to tell you!!

ARGAN: Another time! I'm busy.

TOINETTE: But Monsieur, *listen*——

ARGAN: Hold your tongue!

[*He starts again, but is stopped by some well-struck chords on the spinet.*]

(*Stopping dead.*) What's that?

[*Cléante leaps up from the spinet at which he had seated himself, and comes swiftly forward to Argan, with a flourishing bow.*]

CLÉANTE: Dear Monsieur Argan! Let me present myself; but, first, let me tell you what a great joy it is, an overwhelming privilege to meet you. And, I declare, looking the picture of health!!

TOINETTE (*horrified*): Young sir, are you out of your senses; or are you blind? My Master's ill—and looks it. And when a man is poorly—*very* poorly—

ACT TWO

it's of little comfort to be told you're well. . . . Mind you, he eats, and sleeps, and drinks, and gets about much like the rest of us. But that doesn't prevent him being very ill. If you have any respect for Age, and Suffering, look closer.

CLÉANTE: Oh dear good Monsieur Argan, I ask your pardon. Indeed, I *have* been blind. All my perceptions dulled by the Occasion. . . . But now, looking closer, I can see—oh yes, indeed—the cruel ravages of long ill-health.

[*Argan is unable to suppress a little grunt of gratification. Cléante continues.*]

But I see more than that. Yes. So much more—All the Courage, and the Patience, the Endurance with which you bear it. What an example to us all. ARGAN (*to Toinette*): This fellow knows what he's talking about! Who is he? What's his name?

CLÉANTE: My name is of no matter! But my errand cannot wait.

ARGAN: Eh!!?

CLÉANTE: Only an hour ago, I received a most urgent message——

ARGAN: Message—who from?

[*Cléante looks at Toinette, who is on tenterhooks as to what he is going to say next.*]

CLÉANTE: Your daughter's Music Master.

ARGAN: Her Music Master?!

CLÉANTE: He has himself been summoned to Italy—to give some concerts there.

ARGAN (*rather impressed*): Indeed?

[*And Toinette's eyes grow wider as Cléante's story grows.*]

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

CLÉANTE: And as I am his partner, and his closest friend, he asked me to carry on his lessons, and most especially he begged me to come here. . . . I may say it hasn't been easy—I have had to disappoint some very distinguished pupils of my own, as well as put aside an Operetta I am working at——

TOINETTE (*in spite of herself*): Well! I must say——

CLÉANTE (*turning to her*): But he insisted. She was, he told me, not only his favourite pupil, but his most apt. And her studies, he impressed upon me, must not be interrupted for a day—not even for an hour!

TOINETTE (*joining in*): And of course, this is the hour for her lesson!

CLÉANTE: That is so—and he spoke of her so enthusiastically, and in such glowing terms, that I myself can hardly wait to see her.

ARGAN (*to Toinette*): Go and fetch her.

TOINETTE: Hadn't I better take him to her room?

ARGAN: Certainly not.

TOINETTE: How can he teach her anything with you looking on?

ARGAN: Of course he can.

TOINETTE: It might be too exciting for you! You ought to be resting.

ARGAN: Nonsense, it'll do me good. I'm very fond of music. Be off, and fetch her.

TOINETTE (*under her breath to Cléante*): I'll prepare her for the shock of seeing you.

[*But, at that moment, the door into the bedroom opens; and Angelica appears in the doorway.*]

Merciful Heaven! Too late! . . . Don't let her see you.

[*Cléante retires to the back of the room.*]

ACT TWO

ARGAN: Daughter, here's a young man, who wants to see you.

ANGELICA (*utterly taken aback*): A young man? Wants to see me?

ARGAN: From your Music Master. I gather it's the hour for your Music Lesson.

ANGELICA (*more and more bewildered*): My Music lesson!

ARGAN (*to Cléante, but without turning to him*): And young man! Here's the young lady you so much want to meet! (*Getting no answer, he turns to where Cléante was—but he isn't there!*) Hey! where's he gone to?!

[*He twists himself round to see Cléante at the back of the room, and with his back to the rest of them.*]

What are you doing there?! What's the matter with you?? Are these the manners of a Music Master?? . . . Come and present yourself!

[*With no alternative, Cléante turns round, and comes forward.*]

ANGELICA (*with an involuntary cry*): YOU! (*She tries to strangle it, but can't.*)

TOINETTE (*trying to cover it up*): Mistress!!

[*And then the two girls are struck dumb. Cléante can find nothing to say; so there's a sudden frozen silence. . . . Argan looks from one to the other of them.*]

ARGAN: What's all this about? . . . What's going on? . . . Have you all lost your tongues? . . . (*More and more exasperated.*) Will you please explain!!

[*It is Angelica who speaks: and Toinette and Cléante in a fever of anxiety hang on her every word.*]

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ANGELICA (*unhurried*): I can't believe my eyes! . . . This is the strangest thing that's ever happened to me!!

ARGAN: *Strange?*

ANGELICA: That gentleman!

ARGAN: Your Music Master! What's strange about him?

ANGELICA: Last night I had a dream! . . . I dreamed that I was being taken to some kind of prison . . . it was a life sentence I was being taken to . . . and, suddenly, and quite unexpectedly, someone—so very like this gentleman—appeared; and rescued me. So vivid was the dream, that I woke up—thinking of him. . . . I've been thinking of him ever since . . . indeed I was thinking of him, as I came into the room.

TOINETTE (*with immense relief, to Argan*): Young men in her dreams! I don't call it decent.

CLÉANTE (*playing up, with a kind of mock gallantry, though of course, underneath it isn't mock at all*): And I am happier than I can tell you, Monsieur, to have been in your daughter's thoughts—sleeping or waking. And she can be assured, should the occasion arise, I would come to her rescue—even as in her dream.

[*A sudden loud ringing of a bell, offstage, switches the whole attention of a rather bewildered Argan into another direction.*]

ARGAN (*excitedly*): Ah! The Front Door bell. That's probably Doctor Diaforus, and his son Thomas. I'm expecting 'em. (*To Toinette.*) Go and bring 'em in!

[*He shouts after her as she is going.*]

If it's anyone else, send 'em away.

ACT TWO

[*Toinette disappears; and Argan continues to Cléante.*]

I'm arranging a marriage for my daughter; to the son of the great Doctor Diaforus. He's bringing the young man here for the first time.

CLÉANTE: I'm most fortunate to be present.

ARGAN: They're to be married at once.

CLÉANTE: Is that so? Then I'm even more thankful to be here.

ARGAN: Will her Music Master be back in Paris for the wedding?

CLÉANTE: Very unlikely.

ARGAN: Then you'd better come. We may want some music.

CLÉANTE: I thank you. Since I set eyes on her, to be present at her wedding was something I'd set my heart on.

[*Toinette returns.*]

ARGAN: Well?

TOINETTE: It's them.

ARGAN: Where are they?

TOINETTE: Outside in the passage.

ARGAN: In the passage? What are they doing?

TOINETTE: Well—what do Doctors do?—They're *practising*!

ARGAN: *Practising*? What?

TOINETTE: Don't ask me. Some kind of play-acting.

ARGAN: *Play-acting*??

TOINETTE: Sounded like it. The young one spouting his head off! And the old one listening with both his ears. . . . Oh, Monsieur Argan—what a Choice you've made! That old Doctor Diaforus! What a man! And that young son of his! There's not his like throughout the whole of Paris—there couldn't be! . . . Oh, Mistress! When you see him, there'll

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be no further doubt. The moment you set eyes on him, your mind will be made up. You'll know your future! (*And she turns to Cléante.*) And what a husband is in store for you!

ARGAN: I'm glad you realise it! Ah, here they are!

[*And the two Doctors—father and son—appear in the doorway. They are both wearing large voluminous black gowns; and the traditional doctor's hats—high and conical-shaped; rather like tall Dunces' Caps; but with brims and black. Old Doctor Diaforus is an immense personage; and with such an immense sense of his own importance, that he impresses it on other people. As for his son Thomas—Toinette called him a Boob; and it is an apt description. Behind large spectacles—whether or not he has them on—his expression is one of utter and complete vacancy; he wears, too, an almost perpetual grin—indeed he is not unlike a Ventriloquist's Dummy; which, in a way, he is—with his father pulling the strings and like such a Dummy he is not altogether unendearing—but he remains always a "Boob". But, now, the two old men, Argan and Diaforus, as they are both, for their own purposes, exceedingly anxious to bring off this marriage, wave to each other across the room, and both start shouting to each other at the same time.*]

DR. DIAFORUS	} (<i>together</i>)	{	Ah Monsieur Argan,
ARGAN			there you are—
			Ah Doctor Diaforus, I'm
			so happy to see you—

[*And they both stop . . . and start again, together.*]

DR. DIAFORUS	} (<i>together</i>)	{	My dear, good, and most
ARGAN			illustrious Friend!—
			My Great and Learned
			Doctor!—

ACT TWO

[*And again, they both stop short. . . . And Doctor Diaforus hurries across the room; Argan clambers to his feet; and meeting, they clasp each other by the hand. And, again, they start talking at the same time.*]

ARGAN	} (<i>together</i>)	{	Ah, but such a pleasure to see
DIAFORUS			you.
			Oh, but such a delight to be
			here in your room.

[*They both stop; and both start again.*]

ARGAN	} (<i>together</i>)	{	I want to tell you——
DIAFORUS			I desire to let you know——

[*Again they both stop.*]

DIAFORUS: I ask your pardon.

ARGAN: Not at all. Don't mention it.

[*And this time the Doctor, starting at once, gets a word in first.*]

DIAFORUS: As I was saying I desire to let you know.

ARGAN (*interrupting him*): And I want to tell you——

[*Argan stops to draw breath, and Diaforus hurries on to forestall him.*]

DIAFORUS: —that the two of us, my son and I——

ARGAN (*having got his breath*): Ah yes yes. The two of us, my daughter and myself—— (*He pauses and Diaforus continues.*)

DIAFORUS: Come here in great delight——

ARGAN (*interrupting again*): And with what joy we welcome you.

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DIAFORUS: Yes.

ARGAN: Yes.

[*And then they both start talking again together. And the next two speeches are spoken at the same time, in a growing crescendo.*]

DIAFORUS } (*speaking at the same time as Argan*): My son and I wish to assure you that we do realise the great honour you are conferring on us by this Alliance; and that in all matters pertaining to our Profession of Medicine, as in all else, we are, both of us, always and entirely at your disposal.

ARGAN } (*at the same time as the above speech of Diaforus*): My daughter and I beg you to realise that we do appreciate your great kindness and condescension in calling on us in this way. And I solemnly pledge my word that we shall, all of us, do everything in our power that you will never regret this auspicious entrance into the very bosom of our Family Circle.

[*And the two old boys, coming to the end of their speeches at the same moment, embrace one another, and kiss each other on either cheek. Argan collapses back into his chair, and Diaforus turns and walks back to the vacantly grinning Thomas.*]

THOMAS (*sotto voce, to his father*): My turn now?

DIAFORUS (*under his breath*): Yes.

THOMAS: The old boy first?

DIAFORUS: Yes. Yes.

[*So Thomas walks up to Argan; stands in front of his chair; and starts off as if he were reciting—which he is.*]

ACT TWO

THOMAS: *Father!!* My new Father!! For that is the title by which I shall know you from henceforth. But how much more you are to me than my real father. He begot me—I am the Fruit of his body. But you *chose* me. I am the off-spring of your mind. And as the Mind is much greater than the Body, so of my two fathers, you must—and shall—always take first place.

[*He returns, highly pleased with himself, to Diaforus.*]

THOMAS (*again sotto voce*): All right??

DIAFORUS (*again under his breath*): Optime.

THOMAS: Eh?

DIAFORUS: Very good. But you haven't finished.

THOMAS: I know that. Don't hurry me. Warm work! (*And he takes off his spectacles to mop his forehead with an enormous handkerchief.*) . . . Now, shall I do the next?

DIAFORUS: Yes.

THOMAS: Do I kiss her to start with?

DIAFORUS: Yes.

THOMAS: Oh dear! . . .

[*Without replacing his spectacles he looks round the room, and sees Angelica. He walks up to her; stands before her; and then gives her a sudden unexpected great peck of a kiss—indeed it's rather more like "the straight left" of a boxer than a kiss. She gives a squeal of astonishment. Then Thomas starts.*]

Mother!! My new mother.

ARGAN: That's not my wife you're speaking to!

THOMAS: Oh!! . . . (*He is confused.*) Where is she?

ARGAN: Who?

THOMAS: Your old woman.

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ARGAN: She'll be here in a moment.

THOMAS: Oh!!!

[More confused, he hesitates, and then returns to his father . . . as Diaforus is well down stage and apart from the others, all their exchanges are whispered between themselves.]

Shall I wait for her?

DIAFORUS: No. Say your piece to your betrothed.

THOMAS: Yes. . . . *(He takes a step towards Angelica, stops, and steps back to his father.)* To who?

DIAFORUS: Your wife-to-be.

THOMAS: Oh!! . . . Yes.

[He starts off again; but poor Thomas has been put off, and he returns agitated to his father.]

How does it begin?

DIAFORUS: Memnon——

THOMAS: Eh???

DIAFORUS: "Even as the statue of Memnon"——

THOMAS: Oh yes. *(He returns to stand in front of Angelica, and starts again.)* Dear Gracious Lady; even as the statue of Memnon is said to emit beautiful sounds when warmed by the rays of the Sun, so, I, when kindled by the burning splendour of your loveliness, am constrained to give vent to your praises. . . .

ARGAN: Charming, charming, charming——

THOMAS: Eh?!

ARGAN *(repeating)*: Charming!

[Thomas has turned to him, obviously put off by the interruption; he pulls himself together, and continues.]

THOMAS: And as the Exquisite Flower, known as

ACT TWO

Heliotrope—so the Naturalists inform us—turns its face always towards the Sun;—so, from this moment, my whole Being will always be drawn towards those two twins of loveliness . . . your Eyes!

ANGELICA (*trying to keep a straight face*): Thank you very much.

THOMAS (*kissing at her*): Don't interrupt. There's more. . . . Grant me, then, upon the Altar of your Radiance to offer you my Heart—Bereft of all desires, but the desire to please—Humbly, obediently, willingly for the remainder of my earthly life—and beyond—to be your Slave and—— (*He "dries up", but remembers just in time, and adds:*) —Husband!

TOINETTE: Well!? . . . It only shows!!

ARGAN: Shows what??

TOINETTE: What Education does for a man!

CLÉANTE: Yes, indeed.

ARGAN: You agree!

CLÉANTE: My dear good Monsieur, if his Prescriptions are anything like his speeches, no illness would stand a chance.

ARGAN (*to Diaforus*): There Doctor, you heard. We all congratulate you. And especially my daughter and myself, such a husband, and such a son-in-law.

[*And now, old Doctor Diaforus himself feels that the time has come to make an impression of his own. He, so to speak, takes the floor, making towards Argan.*]

DIAFORUS: My dear, and honoured Friend—I thank you. And, if you will allow me to say so, it is not merely because I am his father that I admit that I have good reason to be well pleased and proud of him. (*He turns to give his son a pat on the back—whose wide grin widens.*) Everyone who has had anything to do with him realises that he is a Young Man, in whom

there is *Nothing . . . Absolutely Nothing. . .* Nothing at all—with which one can find fault. You will no doubt find it difficult to believe; but he was never what you might call a *Bright Child*! He never mixed with other children; never played childish games—he never seemed to understand the Rules—they were beneath him. . . . We had the greatest difficulty in teaching him to read—and when he could, he wouldn't!

ARGAN: You don't say so! You must have been anxious!

DIAFORUS: On the contrary, I was overjoyed!

ARGAN: Overjoyed?

DIAFORUS: To fashion a figure of Clay is a matter of moments, but to carve it out of wood, or hew it from stone, takes time.

ARGAN: Yes, yes, of course, takes time!

DIAFORUS: But which lasts longer?

ARGAN: Ah!! Which, indeed?!

DIAFORUS: Or is of the greater worth? A tree that takes its time in growing, bears the finest fruit.

ARGAN: How true! How very true!

DIAFORUS: When I realised he was slow of Imagination, ponderous in his thinking, I knew that when he made his judgements they would be weighty! And so indeed they are. Once his mind is made up nothing can shift him! At College, he overcame all opposition, by ignoring it. In Medicine, especially, the accumulated Wisdom of the Past is like a Mighty Rock; my son has become part of it. A limpet on its surface. Nothing can budge him. He has no use at all for the Ideas and Theories of the Present, regarding them as he did the childish games of his boyhood, beneath his notice. Indeed he does not so much stand aloof from his fellows, as tower above them.

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ARGAN (*very pleased*): And, no doubt, with your immense influence, you'll get him some splendid position perhaps even at the Court, where he'll have the great ones of the land under his care.

DIAFORUS: In my experience, to attend on the greatest is not always the most satisfactory way of exercising our profession—to practise in less exalted circles is more rewarding.

ARGAN: You surprise me! How so?

DIAFORUS: It's very simple—when the great ones of the world fall ill, and send for us—they expect to be cured. . . . Thomas!

THOMAS: Eh?

DIAFORUS: You've forgotten something.

THOMAS: What?

DIAFORUS: The corpse.

THOMAS: Oh Giminy, yes. (*He becomes really boyish and excited like a child; and runs to Angelica.*) I've got a surprise for you. A wedding present. Tomorrow afternoon, you're to come with me to the Hospital, and watch me dissect a body!

ARGAN: A body! A *dead* body?

THOMAS: Oh yes. Quite dead. But fresh.

ARGAN: Ugh!!

[*And Argan, not wishing to appear squeamish before the doctors, hastily changes the subject.*]

And that reminds me. Music Master! I have to entertain my guests. I want my daughter to sing to them. See to it!

CLÉANTE: At your service, Monsieur. I have come prepared.

ANGELICA (*utterly taken aback*): Prepared. For *what*?

CLÉANTE: For you to sing.

ANGELICA: But I can't sing.

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CLÉANTE (*reprovingly*): Now, my dear pupil! Please! No Modesty! For me—and I should know—you have the most beautiful voice I've ever heard. As to its use—you're learning. And very quickly. But, as an obedient daughter, if I may make so bold, it behoves you to show your father, his guests—and indeed your teacher—how you are progressing.

ANGELICA: But what am I to sing?

CLÉANTE (*producing some manuscript music*): I have it here. A duet. No need for diffidence. I shall sing with you. And as is well known, those that teach singing can never sing themselves.

ARGAN: From what you tell us, this isn't going to be good.

CLÉANTE: That will be for you, Monsieur, to judge. (*And now, waving his manuscript music, it is Cléante who takes the floor.*) This, Monsieur, is a most unusual composition that you are about to hear. It is designed, especially, for Beginners and Teachers who can't sing! . . . It is, as it were, a kind of Improvisation; and may be sung, or intoned in a kind of recitative—a very valuable accomplishment. So the Duettists speak, sing, or intone to each other, as the spirit moves them.

ARGAN: Sounds a bit of a jumble. But go ahead.

CLÉANTE (*handing Angelica a large sheet*): Here is your part!

ANGELICA: This. (*Utterly mystified.*) But there's nothing——

CLÉANTE (*hastily*): Nothing that you can't manage. (*Turning to Argan.*) Now, let me set the scene. You must imagine, then, that I am a shepherd.

ARGAN: An old shepherd, eh?

CLÉANTE: A young one.

TOINETTE (*tumbling to it*): About your own age.

CLÉANTE: *Exactly* my own age. And your daughter,

ACT TWO

Monsieur, you must imagine, is a shepherdess. . . . Now, it so happened that the shepherd, whom I represent, went to the performance of a Masque. And the Shepherdess, as it turned out—you must realise, Monsieur, that such things happen in plays, seldom in real life—was there too . . . she was there, I may add under the protection of an older woman.
TOINETTE: Her Aunt?

CLÉANTE: Extraordinary! Perhaps you know the story——

TOINETTE: The beginning of it. I don't know what comes next, or how it ends.

CLÉANTE: It was indeed her Aunt.

TOINETTE: And in the story, didn't the shepherd know the Aunt.

CLÉANTE (*to Argan*): Now, as it happened the Shepherd knew the Aunt. Poetic Licence is what we call it. Necessary for the plot. Thus he was able to present himself . . . and the shepherd and the shepherdess came face to face. And he saw before him, not a shepherdess but a young Goddess. . . . The Masque no longer held the slightest interest for him; yet it was far too short; for the end of it meant the parting from his lov'd. And when he returned to his home, there was no thought in him but how he could see his loved one once again.

ARGAN: What happened to his sheep?

CLÉANTE: The shepherds and the shepherdesses, whom the poets write of, have no sheep.

ARGAN: Then why are they called shepherds?

CLÉANTE: What else would you call them?

TOINETTE: Master, you mustn't interrupt! Poor shepherd! What did he do?

CLÉANTE: She was so well guarded, he could do nothing. . . . Then the Fates dealt him a dreadful blow! There was a friend of hers.

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TOINETTE (*recognising herself*): A shepherdess too.

CLÉANTE: No. Something of a Country Bumpkin!!

TOINETTE: Oh!!

CLÉANTE: But with a heart of gold. And with her wits about her!

TOINETTE (*mollified*): Yes.

CLÉANTE: And she sent him a message that his Goddess was to be married to another!

ARGAN: That cooked *his* goose!

CLÉANTE: By no means! For by that time, she was as necessary to him as the air he breathed! He was in love. He was in despair. And those two together can breed a reckless courage—Putting aside his shepherd's garments, so that he was, as it were, disguised, he went to the girl's home.

ARGAN: Did he?! The young dog! I'd have given him what for!

CLÉANTE: I'm sure you would. But, as I told you, he was desperate. Besides, he had to find out if the girl loved him, as he loved her—and what was best to do.

. . . It is at this point that the Composition, the Improvisation, begins; for, from now, the feelings are too deep to be expressed otherwise than in music. (*He sits down at the spinet, and improvises, apparently, an introduction; after a few bars, speaking through it.*)

. . . And he expresses his thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears—and she answers. . . . (*He begins to sing to his own accompaniment.*)

“Beautiful shepherdess, I adore you——

Never shepherd was so true;

Tell me, tell me, I implore you

If you love me

Do you love me

Love me, dear, as I love you?”

ANGELICA (*singing back to him to his accompaniment, to the same air.*)

ACT TWO

“Faithful shepherd, without deceiving—
If quite truthful I must be;
Though your vows of love believing
No, I do not
No, I cannot
Love you, quite, as you love me.”

[Cléante's accompaniment changes rhythm and becomes extremely agitato—as he sings back to her.]

CLÉANTE: “Can I believe my ears? What do I learn
That my love you don't return
You do not love!
Or love me less,
Love me less than I love you.”

ANGELICA (*singing her answer to his new rhythm*):
“No, no, dear shepherd—why so blind?
Surely my meaning you can find.
Be sure I love,
And love not less,
I love you more than you love me.”

CLÉANTE (*in an exalted crescendo!*): “You love me more!”

ANGELICA: “I love you more!”

CLÉANTE: “Sing that again; oh, let me hear!”

ANGELICA (*putting her whole soul into it*): “I love you,
love you, shepherd dear!”

[By this time Angelica has completely entered into the spirit of the scene. She pushes Cléante off the spinet-chair, and begins to play a new improvisation of her own, and sing her own words to it.]

ANGELICA: “The world is bright, the day is fair
When you are there!
Tra la, Tra la!

When you are there
When you are there
Tra la, Tra la!"

CLÉANTE (*singing now to her tune*): "This joy is more than I can bear

I walk on air!

Tra la, Tra la!

I walk on air

Tra la, Tra la!"

ANGELICA	}	(<i>singing together</i>): "We walk on air!
CLÉANTE		

ARGAN: Really, I didn't know my daughter was so advanced—playing and singing at sight! Remarkable!

CLÉANTE: But I told you, Monsieur, she is the most apt of all my pupils . . . and, now, as the plot unfolds, and, as they love each other, but she is betrothed to another—

ARGAN (*with fine sarcasm*): Very awkward for 'em!

CLÉANTE (*smooth as silk*): As you so wisely say, good Monsieur, *very* awkward! But, as you will understand, the shepherd, of course, wants to know what she intends to do—and we shall hear!

[*He sits himself on the spinet-chair, now beside Angelica, and plays and sings.*]

CLÉANTE: "Dearest shepherdess, Sweet as May,
Though we love, beyond all measure,
If a father shows displeasure,
Dare a daughter disobey??"

ANGELICA (*beside him, singing and playing*): "I will answer."

CLÉANTE: "You will answer."

ACT TWO

ANGELICA: "I will answer; hear me, pray;
Cupid, God of Love discovers
Ways of helping parted lovers;
It is *Love*, I must obey!"

CLÉANTE (*with some crashing chords of triumph*): "It is
Love, she must obey!"

[*They sing together.*]

ANGELICA } "It is Love I must obey!

CLÉANTE } "It is Love she must obey!"

ARGAN: She's a hussy—that's what she is! If she
were my daughter, I'd have something to say to her.

CLÉANTE (*rising from the stool*): I've no doubt you
would!—And now, Monsieur, we come to the final
Motif; as the plot thickens, as they say, the shepherd
and the shepherdess plan together what they are to
do!

ARGAN: Yes—well, as that doesn't interest me in the
least, I don't want to hear it.

CLÉANTE: But, Monsieur, that is the most important,
indeed the Main Theme, of the whole composition.

ARGAN: It may be. But I can do without it. Good-
day.

CLÉANTE: But, Monsieur, I understood that you were
fond of music.

ARGAN: So I am. But I only like music I've heard
before—*Good-day*!

CLÉANTE: But Monsieur!—One has to hear music
for the first time.

ARGAN: Why?

CLÉANTE: Why! . . . But Monsieur——

ARGAN: GOOD-DAY!!!

[*Cléante stands there unmoving and undecided.*]

I must say for a musician, you seem very deaf.

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Good-day!!! You told me you had a lot of other distinguished pupils—you'd better go to one of them.

CLÉANTE: But Monsieur—I've put them off!

ARGAN: Then go and get on with that operetta of yours.

CLÉANTE (*knowingly*): Aah Monsieur—there, one has to wait for Inspiration.

ARGAN: Then go and wait somewhere else. *Goodbye!*

[*And Cléante has to go. . . . Angelica gets up to follow him.*]

Where are you going?

ANGELICA: To see him out!

ARGAN: He can see himself out! Where are your manners? We have guests.

[*Béline enters from the bedroom.*]

Ah! There you are, my dear. For your own sake, I wish you'd been here sooner. You would have heard young Thomas say some very beautiful and eloquent things, both to myself and to Angelica!

TOINETTE (*to Béline*): Yes! And for a Wedding present—he's promised she shall watch him dissect a corpse!

BÉLINE: *A corpse!!*

ARGAN (*to Toinette*): Hold your tongue!! (*To his wife.*) But you *are* in time to hear her accept his offer of marriage——

TOINETTE: Corpse and all!

ANGELICA: But, Father——

ARGAN: What d'you mean—"but Father". You've nothing to say to me. But to young Doctor Thomas . . . and he's waiting.

THOMAS (*going to her; with a more than usually large and vacant grin*): That's right! I'm waiting!

ACT TWO

ANGELICA (*again to her father*): I beg you not to hurry this!

ARGAN: Eh?!

ANGELICA: Give us a little time to get to know each other . . . so that . . . so that . . . our mutual inclinations——

THOMAS (*interrupting*): But I have mutual inclinations, and I don't want to wait.

ANGELICA (*now addressing herself directly to young Thomas*): Good sir, it isn't easy to overcome the habits of Modesty that my dear father has impressed upon me since I was a child. In matters of the heart, a girl doesn't respond so readily as does a man.

ARGAN: Bosh! You'll have plenty of time for "mutual inclinations" and "matters of the heart", after you're married.

DR. DIAFORUS: If I may interpose——

ARGAN: Of course.

DR. DIAFORUS: As my son loves your daughter, there is no need to wait.

ANGELICA (*now addressing herself directly to the old Doctor*): Good Doctor Diaforus, you are a Man of Learning and Understanding. (*He inclines his head; she continues.*) If your son loves me, as you say he does, and as consideration for the loved one is a great part of love, he wouldn't wish to force me, where I've no wish to go.

DR. DIAFORUS (*heavily*): Nego Consequentiam, Mademoiselle, Nego Consequentiam! If we view this matter scientifically and mathematically, as indeed we must, there is only so much love that can be felt between two people—and my son has enough for both—Quod est demonstrandum.

TOINETTE: It's no good arguing, Mistress. When they talk Latin there's no answering them.

BÉLINE: There'll be no arguing. Angelica! Your

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refusal to obey your father, makes me even more certain than I was before—a Convent's the place for you!

TOINETTE: I have no doubt, Madame, you have your reasons for saying that.

BÉLINE (*outraged*): Reasons!!

TOINETTE: I don't know what they are. But nor does your husband!

BÉLINE (*livid with rage*): Out of my sight! Out of this room!!

TOINETTE (*bouncing out*): With pleasure! (*At the door she turns.*) And let me tell you this; if she takes the Veil, I take it too.

ARGAN: And a good riddance.

TOINETTE: And, as you know I can't behave, we should both of us be turned out, before you could turn round! (*And she disappears. . . . Again Angelica tries to escape.*)

BÉLINE: Where are you going?

ANGELICA: After Toinette.

BÉLINE: Stop here!

ARGAN (*to Diaforus*): I'm sorry you should be present, Doctor, at these family bickerings; but they mean nothing.

DR. DIAFORUS (*who is very angry*): That's as may be! But this meeting has not turned out as I expected. We'll take our leave!

ARGAN: Oh no, no, no, please, please. Not before you've told me how I am.

[*So the old Doctor, still in a great rage, strides across the room to Argan, and seizing one of his wrists, motions Thomas to take the other.*]

DR. DIAFORUS: Thomas! The other wrist! . . . Well, what of the patient's pulse?

ACT TWO

THOMAS (*after fumbling to find it*): He hasn't got one!
ARGAN: Eh?

DR. DIAFORUS: It is Durus——

THOMAS: Yes.

DR. DIAFORUS: Not to say Durisculus.

THOMAS (*repeating*): Durisculus.

DR. DIAFORUS: Denoting a Distemper in the Parenchyme.

THOMAS: That's right. A Distemper in the . . . what-you-said.

DR. DIAFORUS: —or more positively—the Spleen.

THOMAS: The Spleen.

ARGAN: Dr. Purgon says it's my Liver.

DR. DIAFORUS: Doubtless that is affected too. He orders, of course, nothing but *roasted* meat.

ARGAN: Boiled. Only boiled.

DR. DIAFORUS: Quite right. In your condition it couldn't matter less. (*As he moves to the door.*) Doctor Purgon knows his business. You are in good hands. (*At the door, he turns to see Thomas ogling Angelica; and continues.*) If this marriage, upon which my son has set his heart, is to be consummated, as was arranged, inform me at my house, before tonight. Come, Thomas. (*And he sweeps out, followed by a reluctant Thomas.*)

ARGAN (*to Angelica*): Now see what you've done.

[*Béline has opened the door into the bedroom and beckoned . . . the Lawyer Bonnefoy has appeared.*]

BÉLINE (*going to Argan*): Dear husband—if you'd only take my advice!

ARGAN: No, my sweet wife, no. I love you more than anything on earth, but Angelica is my daughter, and I'm quite resolved. . . . Master Lawyer, can you at once, and here and now, draw up a Marriage Contract?

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BONNEFOY: Indeed I can.

ARGAN: And will you then take it, yourself, to Doctor Diaforus, within the hour.

BONNEFOY: Most certainly.

ARGAN: Then you will do so. . . . And you, Angelica, you don't leave this house until the Wedding Ceremony.

[So, Angelica sits there, the three of them glaring at her . . . her face crumples and she bursts into tears; and cries and cries. . . . From off-stage there is the sound of singing.]

CLÉANTE'S VOICE (*singing the words and phrases he has already sung*): "Cupid, God of Love, discovers
Ways of helping parted lovers—
It is Love, we must obey. . . ."

[She lifts her face to listen and the light returns to her eyes.]

(*Repeating the last line.*) "It is Love, we must obey!"
ARGAN: There's that damned fellow still hanging
about the place—

Curtain

ACT THREE

Argan is in his chair, and alone in his room—he is taking his temperature, with an outside thermometer. . . . The music of the Entre-Act continues for some moments after the Curtain rises—during which Argan keeps looking at the thermometer with more and more annoyance. . . . When the music dies away into silence, he looks at it for the last time.

ARGAN: Normal!! . . . Ridiculous! The dam' thing isn't working . . . not to be trusted. (*He throws it away.*) Nothing's to be trusted nowadays. Nothing. And nobody. Monstrous. . . . How's my pulse. (*He feels one of his wrists.*) Thump. Thump. Thump. Oh my poor heart. (*He puts his hand on it.*) How it beats! There must be something wrong with it. (*He feels for the pulse on his other wrist.*) Very queer! I can't find it. Oh, but this is the one young Thomas couldn't find—he knows his business. (*Holding up one wrist.*) God help me! This one galloping like a race-horse. . . . (*He holds up the other one.*) And here, there's nothing! That must be very bad for me. I'm all lop-sided.

[*His wife, Béline, makes a sudden and hurried entrance. She is obviously very angry, as well as alarmed.*]

BÉLINE (*speaking as she appears*): Husband, there's something going on, here, in this house, that's very wrong!

ARGAN (*much too occupied in his frenzied search for the missing pulse to notice the state she is in*): No need to tell me that!

BÉLINE: It's something more than wrong!

ARGAN (*still no pulse*): I'm very much afraid you may be right!

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BÉLINE: It's *dangerous*!

ARGAN (*stopping dead*): Eh??!! Dangerous! Good God—send for the Doctor!

BÉLINE (*scarcely able to restrain her impatience*): Husband! If you please—listen to this!

ARGAN: Listen to my pulse! Thump, thump, thump!

BÉLINE: Just now, upstairs, walking along the passage, I passed your daughter's door.

ARGAN: Which one? Which door? Which daughter? Angelica, or little Louise?

BÉLINE: Angelica, of course. I stood there—thunder-struck—*What do you think I heard?*

ARGAN: How should I know?!

BÉLINE: Voices!

ARGAN: Voices?

BÉLINE: Voices!

ARGAN: You stood outside Angelica's door; and you heard voices.

BÉLINE: That's what I've telling you.

ARGAN: Well—what's wrong with that? What did you expect to hear?

BÉLINE: Not a *Man's* voice!

ARGAN: Merciful Heaven! What was he saying?

BÉLINE: I couldn't hear. So I opened the door, and I went in . . . *and what do you think I saw?*

ARGAN: I wish you'd tell me, dear one, and not keep asking me questions!

BÉLINE: Kneeling before your daughter was a young man. Her hands in his; and he was kissing them!

ARGAN: Kissing her hands?

BÉLINE: Yes.

ARGAN: Disgusting! . . . Who was he?

BÉLINE: I don't know.

ARGAN: Didn't you ask him?

BÉLINE: He gave me no chance. . . . I stood there

ACT THREE

by the open door; Angelica looked up and saw—she snatched her hands from his, and gave a cry.

ARGAN: I'm not surprised.

BÉLINE: The young man turned and saw me; leapt from his knees; pushed past me at the door; ran along the passage; bounded down the stairs—and has just left the house.

ARGAN: What did Angelica say?

BÉLINE: I didn't wait to ask. I've come straight to you. She's your daughter—you must deal with her.

ARGAN (*very distressed*): Oh dear, this couldn't have happened at a worse time for me—only one pulse functioning.

BÉLINE: Pulse or no pulse, my dear—you must do your duty.

ARGAN: Duty?

BÉLINE: Of course.

ARGAN: If you put it like that. . . . Very well—Send her to me.

BÉLINE: She'd only lie to you. I have a better plan.

ARGAN: Eh?

BÉLINE: Your younger daughter!

ARGAN: Little Louise? What's *she* to do with it?

BÉLINE: Sitting in that same room, in a corner, as quiet and as demure, as if she were in church—was Louise.

ARGAN: *Was* she indeed. (*Then, most unexpectedly, he laughs.*) SPLENDID!!

BÉLINE (*quite taken aback*): Are you out of your mind?

ARGAN: Surprisingly—with all I have to bear—I'm *not*!

BÉLINE (*puzzled—and in no good temper*): Husband—I don't understand you!

ARGAN: You will in a moment. . . . First, tell me this plan of yours.

BÉLINE: Whatever Angelica is up to—and she's up

to something—Louise knows of it. Angelica isn't afraid of you; and Louise is. You're much more likely to get the truth from *her*.

ARGAN: You're always right, my dear—but this time you're more right than you know. . . . Now, I'll tell *you* something. . . . I'm not quite such an old fool as I may look!

BÉLINE: Darling, I'm *sure* you're not. You couldn't be!

ARGAN: Bless you for that! . . . Well, I had an idea Angelica might try to run away, or be up to some mischief—which, as you say, she is—so I told Louise to keep an eye on her!!

BÉLINE: You did??

ARGAN: I did. To watch, and listen—never to let Angelica out of her sight. . . . So, you see, when she was sitting there, in the corner, “quiet as if she were in church”, she was doing what I told her: Watching and listening—to come and report to me.

BÉLINE (*unconvinced*): If that's so, so much the better. But if she's deceiving you!—

ARGAN (*indignant*): Louise deceiving me! Ridiculous!!! She wouldn't *dare*. I'll get the truth out of her, never fear! (*Then he seems to be seized by a sudden paroxysm of ferocity!*) If need be, I'll *terrify* it out of her! I'll stop at nothing! Although she's my daughter, my own flesh and blood, she'll rue the day that she was born! So go and fetch her!

BÉLINE (*going towards the door*): I'll send her to you.

[*Béline disappears.*]

ARGAN (*having watched her go*): . . . Oh dear, oh dear! —I don't like this at all! . . . Poor little Louise! . . . This calls for a drop of something! . . . What shall it be? (*And he eyes the row of medicine*

ACT THREE

bottles beside him, as if they were a row of drinks in a cocktail bar.) Something for my heart?—to stop it beating! Yes, I think that's what I want! (*As he selects a bottle.*) I have to keep calm; I mustn't get out of control! (*As he pours the contents into a medicine glass.*) This is a strain! That's what it is! A Nervous strain! (*As he lifts the glass to his lips.*) Good Health! (*But before he drinks, he stops and repeats.*) A Nervous strain! (*He hesitates and sets down the glass.*) . . . Perhaps something for my nerves would be the better! After all, this is enough to upset anybody! (*So he selects another bottle and glass, and pours another dose—as he does so:*) I won't be able to handle this, if I allow my nerves to get the better of me! . . . (*So, now, he has the two filled glasses in front of him.*) Now—which shall it be? . . . I think Nerves! (*So he drinks the dose.*) Ah!!! Here she comes! (*And he gulps down the other one, too.*)

[*Young Louise, a girl of about fifteen, appears at the door.*]

(*Barking at her.*) Oh, there you are! Come in!

[*Louise takes just one very tiny and very unwilling step into the room. . . . Argan doesn't notice this, as he is busying himself wiping the two glasses, and putting back the medicine bottles in their places . . . he looks up; and barks again even more fiercely.*]

What are you doing there? I said, Come in.

[*Louise takes just one more tiny step into the room, and Argan finishes what he is doing.*]

ARGAN (*fiercer barking*): I said Come in. Here, here, here. In front of me. (*She does, very slowly.*) Hold up

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your head. That's right! Now. What have you got to tell me?

LOUISE: . . . To tell you, father?

ARGAN: Yes.

LOUISE: Nothing!

ARGAN: *Nothing??!*

LOUISE: Nothing!

ARGAN (*with terrifying menace!*): Nothing to tell me?

LOUISE (*sticking to it*): No.

ARGAN: Think again—or it'll be the worse for you. You *have* something to tell me, and I want to know it.

LOUISE: . . . If you like, I could tell you the story of "The Raven and the Fox", or "The Ass's Skin"—I know that one by heart.

ARGAN: I'll give you "Ass's skin". . . . And a sore one! . . . Now, listen: Didn't I tell you to watch your sister for me.

LOUISE: Yes.

ARGAN: And have you?

LOUISE (*hedging*): Have I what?

ARGAN: Aaah! . . . *Watched* her?

LOUISE (*with great emphasis*): Oh *yes*. *Yes*; I *have*.

ARGAN: And you promised to come and tell me, if you saw, or heard, anything unusual.

LOUISE: Yes.

ARGAN: And have you?

LOUISE: Have I what!

ARGAN: Aaah! . . . Have you seen or heard anything unusual?

LOUISE: No!

ARGAN (*very deliberately*): Today, within the last hour—within the last few minutes—you haven't?

LOUISE: No.

ARGAN: NO??!

LOUISE: No.

ARGAN: Are you quite certain?

ACT THREE

LOUISE: *Quite!*

ARGAN: Oh! This is *Monstrous!* . . . only a moment ago, your step-mother came down and told me she'd been in your sister's room; and you were there too. . .

LOUISE: Yes.

ARGAN: *And there was a Man kissing Angelica?*

LOUISE: Yes.

ARGAN: Isn't that unusual?

LOUISE: No.

ARGAN: Aaah!!

LOUISE: Anyhow, I didn't see him.

ARGAN: *Didn't see him??*

LOUISE: No; I shut my eyes.

ARGAN: Aaah!!! . . . What were they saying?

LOUISE: I didn't hear.

ARGAN: Why not?

LOUISE: They were whispering.

ARGAN (*beginning to haul himself out of his chair*): This is Enough! More than Enough!! Too much!!! (*He is up; and goes and picks out from a cupboard an out-size birch rod.*) You're not telling the truth; you must be punished.

LOUISE: No!

ARGAN: Yes!!

LOUISE: Oh my dear father—

ARGAN: Don't you "dear father" me.

LOUISE: It was my sister.

ARGAN (*stopping*): Eh??

LOUISE: She made me promise not to tell you. But I will. I'll tell you everything.

ARGAN: Oh yes. You will. Indeed you will—but *after* you've been punished.

LOUISE: Oh No No No.

ARGAN: Oh Yes Yes Yes. You're my daughter. And I have a duty towards you. *To lie is very wicked.* And if I don't punish you, Heaven will. So this is

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something you should be grateful for! Turn round!
(*She does.*) Bend over!

[*She does . . . and he gives her a single swish with the birch-rod. It is, as a matter of fact, a very half-hearted and harmless swish. And through all her clothes, she obviously couldn't even have felt it—but she sets up the most appalling howling!*]

For Heaven's sake, be quiet! Don't make that row!

[*Louise goes into a crescendo of howls, wails, and groans.*]

What a ridiculous fuss! I hardly touched you!

LOUISE: Hardly touched me! You've half-killed me!
I think I'm going to faint!

ARGAN: Faint!

LOUISE: The room's going round and round . . .
everything's getting dark—I think I'm dying!

ARGAN: *Dying?*!

LOUISE: Yes . . . and I hope I am!

[*And she stages a spectacular sway, stagger, and fall . . . and lies on the floor unmoving.*]

ARGAN (*eyeing her, puzzled*): Louise!!!

[*She doesn't move; and he begins to get alarmed.*]

Louise!! (*Still she doesn't move; and he gets frightened.*)
Louise!!!

[*He goes to her; and lifts up one of her arms, but when he lets it go it falls back lifeless on to the floor . . . then he flops down beside her, really frightened.*]

Oh God help me! What have I done? I don't know
my own strength—that's what it was! Louise!!

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Louise! Dear poor little Louise!!! (*And he begins to cry.*) Oh God forgive me. For I'll never forgive myself.

LOUISE (*from the floor; without moving, or opening her eyes*): It's all right, father, you needn't cry so much—I'm not quite dead.

ARGAN: Oh Heaven be praised! (*He struggles to his feet.*) Oh how you frightened me! (*He walks away; but suddenly stops and turns.*) You're not being artful? You're not pretending??

LOUISE: I'm going off again!

ARGAN (*running back to her*): Oh No. Louise!

LOUISE (*sitting up*): Darling father!

ARGAN: Sweet little daughter!

[*And so they remain for a moment. Then:*]

But you're going to tell me everything you know.

LOUISE: Oh *yes*, I am.

ARGAN: Good. . . . Go ahead——

[*And feeling he has scored a triumph, Argan gets up, and seats himself, expectant, on his chair.*]

LOUISE (*now kneeling on the floor*): Well! . . . I was sitting in my sister's room alone—and a Man came in.

ARGAN: What sort of man?

LOUISE: Oh, he was young; and very handsome.

ARGAN: What did you do?

LOUISE: I asked him who he was.

ARGAN: What did he say?

LOUISE: He said he was her Music Master!

ARGAN: *Aaab!* That fellow again! And then?

LOUISE: Angelica came in.

ARGAN: What did she say?

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LOUISE: She said: . . . "Oh, my God—you! For heaven's sake, *Get out!!*

ARGAN: Oh! She said that.

LOUISE: Yes . . . and then she added: "if you're found here, everything is over"—but he wouldn't go.

ARGAN: Wouldn't he?! What did he say?

LOUISE: Oh, all sorts of things.

ARGAN: What sort of things?

LOUISE: He said he loved her.

ARGAN: What more?

LOUISE: Nothing more.

ARGAN: You said he said all sorts of things.

LOUISE: He said he loved her—in all sorts of ways! . . . Then he went down on his knees; and took her hands and kissed them; and stepmother came in; and he jumped up and ran away.

ARGAN: Yes?

LOUISE: That's all!

ARGAN: All! But I know all that!

LOUISE: Then why did you ask?

ARGAN: I want to know the rest.

LOUISE: There isn't any more.

[*Argan gets up from his chair; and advances on her slowly and again with menace.*]

ARGAN: Louise! If you've been watching your sister as I told you to—as you say you have—you know a lot more than you've told me.

LOUISE (*obstinate again*): I've told you all I know.

ARGAN: Louise! (*He is now standing in front of the kneeling girl—and holds out his little finger to her.*) 'This little finger of mine knows everything.

LOUISE: Then why don't you ask it!

ARGAN: Eh?! Very well, yes—I will. . . . (*He*

ACT THREE

puts his little finger in one of his ears.) It's whispering to me that there are a whole lot of things you haven't told me.

[And he waggles his finger in Louise's face. . . . Suddenly she bites it hard. He gives a yell of pain, and hops about, wringing his hand.]

Why did you do that?

LOUISE: Your little finger's wicked—telling lies. I punished it!

[Argan loses control. With a bellow of rage, he picks up the birch-rod again and plunges at her . . . she eludes him . . . he goes after her . . . she keeps out of his way, until she runs out of the room . . . and Argan collapses exhausted, and still clasping his large birch-rod. . . . Toinette enters.]

TOINETTE (*as she appears*): Your brother to see you, Monsieur.

[Argan's brother, Béralde, follows Toinette into the room. He is a man of immense exuberance, and comes bursting in, like a great gust of wind.]

BÉRALDE (*going straight to Argan with outstretched arms*): Ah! My dear fellow!!!

[At once seizing hold of one of Argan's hands, and much to the old man's outraged discomfort, nearly shakes his arm off. Then, violently, he kisses him first on one cheek, then on the other. Then seizes him by both hands and holds him at arm's length.]

Now, let's have a look at you! Oh but you look splendid.

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[*And he gives him an enormous thump on the back, which makes Argan gasp and splutter, and he drops the birch-rod.*]

Great Heavens, man—what are you doing with *that* thing? . . . And why was little Louise running out of the room, as if the devil himself were after her?

ARGAN: Oh brother, I'm very ill.

BÉRALDE: Ill?

ARGAN: Weak! Far too weak to answer any questions! Much too exhausted to talk.

BÉRALDE: But that's what I came to do!

ARGAN: Impossible!

BÉRALDE: *Nonsense!* I don't believe it.

ARGAN (*in a croak*): I'm very hard of hearing—And I've lost my voice!

BÉRALDE: That's a pity! I came to propose a husband for Angelica.

ARGAN (*suddenly yelling*): *The Music Master!!!*

BÉERALDE (*very surprised; but hugely amused—as he nearly always is*): Music Master? He's certainly not that; though the young man I have in mind has many accomplishments. He's handsome. Well-connected. Rich. And loves Angelica. And what's even more important she loves him.

ARGAN: Ah, those girls of mine! They'll drive me out of my mind!

BÉRALDE: I think they have.

ARGAN: What do you mean by that?

BÉRALDE: Just what I say! . . . However I'm glad my visit has done you a bit of good.

ARGAN: Eh?

BÉRALDE: Well—you seem to be able to hear. And you've recovered your voice. And, at least, a little strength—so we'll discuss it further.

ARGAN: I'm sorry I have to leave you.

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[*And he gets up, and starts towards his bedroom.*]

TOINETTE (*calling after him*): Monsieur Argan!

ARGAN (*stopping*): Yes?

TOINETTE: You've forgotten——

ARGAN: Eh?

TOINETTE: You can't walk without your stick.

ARGAN: Oh yes. (*He returns for his stick; and, this time, limps off. As he goes.*) Thank you—very careless of me!

[*And he disappears into his bedroom.*]

TOINETTE (*at once; to Béralde*): Oh Monsieur Béralde, thank God you've come. You'll save my mistress, won't you?

BÉRALDE: Save her?

TOINETTE: This marriage is tomorrow——

BÉRALDE: Tomorrow!!

TOINETTE: —and she's being kept a prisoner; upstairs.

BÉRALDE (*really startled*): Prisoner!!

TOINETTE: If there were only some way of putting it off!

BÉRALDE: Well—isn't there?

TOINETTE: The only thing that would divert your brother's mind is a new illness; and a new treatment, drastic and very urgent.

BÉRALDE: He shall have it!

TOINETTE: Easy enough to say! All the doctors are on his side—they wouldn't help.

BÉRALDE: Then get a new one.

TOINETTE: That's the only way.

BÉRALDE: Can you get hold of one?

TOINETTE: I have a thought.

BÉRALDE: What is it?

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TOINETTE: It's quite mad!—But so am I. He's coming back!—Oh, Monsieur Béralde, stay here—and do your best! And, above all, keep him in a good temper. Leave the rest to me!

[And she runs out of the door; as Argan re-appears from his bedroom; and goes to his chair, and begins to clamber on to it.]

BÉRALDE: Can I give you a hand?

ARGAN: No, thank you. I can help myself.

[When he is re-seated, Béralde walks up to him.]

BÉRALDE: Yes. I can see now. You're not looking so well as I first thought you were.

[Argan grunts; not without gratification.]

I'm very sorry. I should have been more sympathetic. . . . Oh, but you're a dear fellow; and I'm very fond of you.

[Argan gives him a look! And grunts again—not without suspicion. . . . Béralde moves a chair, so as to sit closer to his brother.]

And, surely, two brothers can discuss family affairs quietly and reasonably—without getting excited.

ARGAN: I shan't get excited.

BÉRALDE: And, most certainly, nor shall I!

ARGAN (*drily*): Our conversation seems likely to be an unexciting one!

BÉRALDE: But if I ask you a few questions, perhaps you'd answer them.

ARGAN: Why shouldn't I?

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BÉRALDE: That's very good of you.

ARGAN: Don't mention it!

[And now they are both behaving as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths!]

BÉRALDE: Ah, bless you—you've a heart of gold.

ARGAN: *Gold!* I doubt it. There's something the matter with it—but not that!

BÉRALDE (*laughing, as pleasantly as he can*): And such a wit! . . . Now! let me ask you this: . . . Why, with all your money, are you marrying your daughter to a man she doesn't want?

[There is a tiny, tense pause . . . and as the strain gets harder between them, their exchanges get sweeter and sweeter.]

ARGAN: To get myself a son-in-law who's useful to me!

BÉRALDE: Surely a strange reason?

ARGAN: What's strange about it? . . . I should have called it eminently *sensible*.

BÉRALDE: Sensible!

ARGAN: That's what I said.

BÉRALDE: Forgive me, brother dear, if I seem slow-witted—but explain yourself.

ARGAN: He's a Doctor. And his father is a Doctor. And his Uncle is a Doctor. *My* Doctor. And in a case like mine, three doctors are better than one.

BÉRALDE: Ah! . . . I see.

ARGAN: I thought you would.

BÉRALDE: And so I suppose, when Louise comes of age, you'll marry her to an apothecary?!

ARGAN: By God, a good idea! I hadn't thought of it. Thank you for mentioning it.

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[Which is too much for Béralde. He leaps from his chair and speaks in a sudden gale of indignation.]

BÉRALDE: Really! You're *impossible*! Sacrificing your daughter to your ridiculous illnesses! You! The healthiest man I've ever known!

ARGAN (*yelling back with rage*): Me!!! *Healthy!!?*

BÉRALDE: *Robust!!* I wish to God I had your constitution. Any other man with all your bleedings and purgings, and Heaven knows what else, (*with a wave of his arm towards the bar!*) emptying all those poisons into yourself—*corroding* your wretched stomach—any other man would have been dead years ago!

ARGAN (*livid*): So! You'd set yourself up against the Accumulated Wisdom of the Ages!!

BÉRALDE: *Bosh!!*

ARGAN: Bosh????

BÉRALDE: Bosh!!!

ARGAN: You're an arrogant idiot—you always were!!

BÉRALDE (*beside himself*): And you're a—— (*But he makes a superhuman effort to control himself.*) . . . No! Heaven help me, I'll not lose my temper. I'll not quarrel with you.

[*And he begins to pace swiftly up and down the room, as if to cool himself by the very draught he is creating. Gradually the pacing slackens, and when he is still again his voice is conciliatory, sincere, and eminently reasonable.*]

BÉRALDE: Brother, each one of us, waking or sleeping, walking or sitting, is a living Miracle. But, like all Miracles beyond our knowledge. And of how the Miracle works we know nothing. Take this new theory that the blood circulates. Does it? Or doesn't it? Who knows? And who will ever know?

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ARGAN: You exaggerate—you always did.

BÉRALDE: Maybe—maybe, in years to come, hundreds of years, we may have more knowledge. And then perhaps Doctors may be of use—although I doubt it. But now it's guess work. And their guesses alter every month. They do more harm than good.

ARGAN: Yet when men are ill, they call a Doctor.

BÉRALDE: That's a proof of man's gullibility—not of the Doctor's skill!

ARGAN: But Doctors trust each other; and themselves.

BÉRALDE: My dear good fellow, the great Deceivers of the world begin by deceiving themselves. They have to, or they wouldn't be so good at it! And, as a matter of fact, I'm not alone in thinking as I do. You should come to the theatre with me, and see one of Molière's plays on this same subject.

ARGAN: Molière! Don't talk to me of Molière! That rogue! That scribbling Ass! That Fool! Writing his silly plays against the Art of Medicine. He ought to be punished, and I hope he will be. . . . I know, if I were a Doctor, and he was sick, I'd refuse to treat him.

BÉRALDE: I don't think that would worry Molière! Only the other day, when I was at his house, he said to me "I wish I hadn't got to act tonight, I don't feel well"—"Then why don't you see a Doctor," said his wife? "A Doctor," he replied, "I should never survive a Doctor—I'm a sick man! I want all my strength, just to keep alive!"

[Upon which a most alarming-looking man appears in the doorway, carrying an even more alarming-looking outsize syringe.]

Heavens alive! Who's this?!

ARGAN: Ah! My Apothecary.

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APOTHECARY (*advancing into the room with a flourish of the syringe*): Now, Monsieur—if you please.

ARGAN: Yes yes. I'll be ready in a moment. . . .
Dear brother, I'm afraid I must ask you to retire.

BÉRALDE: To retire?

ARGAN: That's what I said—to leave us alone.

BÉRALDE: But I haven't said half what I came to say!

ARGAN: Most unfortunate! . . . Some other time.

BÉRALDE: Some other time will be too late.

ARGAN: What d'you mean "too late"?

BÉRALDE: I came to talk about my niece's marriage—which now I gather is to take place tomorrow.

ARGAN: Quite right. Tomorrow. It's all settled. So there's nothing to be said.

BÉRALDE (*this time, although very angry, he does not lose his temper, but seems to chose his words with purpose*): I see how it is!! You're behaving so *disgracefully*—

ARGAN (*outraged*): Can I believe my ears?

BÉRALDE: I doubt it—you're hard of hearing! So let me repeat: you're behaving so *disgracefully*; with such utter selfishness; with such wanton, unnatural, unfatherly cruelty, that you dare not even talk about it.

ARGAN: Dare not?!

BÉRALDE: That's what I said. It's not your *hearing* that you've lost—dear brother—but your *conscience*!!!

ARGAN: Insufferable! You don't know what you're talking about?

BÉRALDE: How can you say that, when you won't even listen to me?

ARGAN: In front of the Apothecary? Have you no family feeling?

BÉRALDE: Ask him to go.

[*At which the Apothecary seems suddenly to become inflated.*]

ACT THREE

APOTHECARY: Sir!

BÉRALDE: Send him away!

APOTHECARY (*to Béralde*): *I beg your pardon!!*

BÉRALDE: Granted! . . . (*To Argan.*) Put off this absurd treatment. Have it this evening; or tomorrow morning.

APOTHECARY: I take that very much amiss.

BÉRALDE: You can take it how you will.

APOTHECARY (*to Argan*): I don't know who this gentleman is.

ARGAN: My brother.

APOTHECARY: I'm sorry to hear it. (*To Béralde.*) Sir, I'm a busy man; I can't afford to waste my time like this.

BÉRALDE: Surely you're paid for it.

APOTHECARY: That's not the point.

BÉRALDE: I should have thought it was. (*To Argan.*) Well brother, am I right? Are you too utterly ashamed of what you're doing to hear me out.

ARGAN: Of course I'm not.

BÉRALDE: Then prove it to me . . . or show yourself a coward—as well as heartless.

ARGAN (*to the Apothecary*): Good Master Apothecary, you hear! Some other time—at your convenience. In an hour; or half an hour. When you will. Or in a few minutes . . . I shall be here.

[*The Apothecary stalks to the door with incredible disapproval, and turns.*]

APOTHECARY: I dare not think what Doctor Purgon will have to say to this.

ARGAN (*appalled*): Doctor Purgon! But how should he know?

APOTHECARY: He's at your Front Door.

ARGAN: At my Front Door!

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

APOTHECARY: Sitting in his carriage. He drove me here, and said he'd wait for me. . . . If I know Doctor Purgon—and I do—you will hear more of this. Good-day.

[*And he and his great syringe disappear.*]

ARGAN (*in a dreadful state*): What have I done? What have you made me do?

BÉRALDE: Postpone what I should imagine a most unsavoury experience!

ARGAN: But you heard the apothecary! What if Doctor Purgon should be angry.

BÉRALDE: Why should he be? And indeed what if he is. You've only put off one of his incessant treatments for an hour. He'll add something to his bill—and drive away, Apothecary, Syringe and all to plague some other credulous idiot! . . . Now. About Angelica! . .

[*But the Apothecary makes a triumphant but menacing re-appearance.*]

APOTHECARY: Doctor Purgon wishes a word with you!

[*And Doctor Purgon comes buzzing and hissing into the room, like some very angry wasp.*]

DR. PURGON: Here's a nice state of affairs!

ARGAN (*petrified*): Ah—good Doctor Purgon!—

DR. PURGON: Don't "Doctor Purgon" me! Never, in all my professional life, have I been so insulted!

ARGON: Oh no—

DR. PURGON: To have one of my Remedies, refused.

ARGAN: Refused! No. No—Postponed.

ACT THREE

DR. PURGON: If anything, that's *Worse!* . . . With *my* Medicines, *when* they are taken is even more important than what they *are!*

ARGAN (*in great penitence*): I was very wrong. My brother persuaded me.

DR. PURGON: Your brother is not my Patient. He is no concern of mine.

BÉRALDE: Fortunately for me!

DR. PURGON (*darting at him, and peering close into his face*): Don't be too sure! You're sickening for something. (*He turns again on Argan.*) No, Monsieur Argan—it's *you* who are to blame.

ARGAN: Yes. Very much to blame. And I'm so sorry—

DR. PURGON: And well you may be! It was a Special and Most Extra-Ordinary Mixture—never before administered to any living thing! One of my Inspirations! It came to me, in one of the Long Watches of the Night, and I arose—and prepared it for you, with my own hands!

ARGAN (*despairing*): Oh!

DR. PURGON: You may well groan!—Every Separate Ingredient was to have had its own effect, upon your every ailment! It was to have cleansed your whole system—at *one Squirt!*

ARGAN: One Squirt??

DR. PURGON: *One Squirt.* I sent in my Apothecary at the appointed Moment, and he returned to me—the Syringe unemptied, My Miracle of Healing unperformed—balked of his Errand of Mercy. . . . And that constitutes not only a mortal Insult to me personally, but to the whole Medical Faculty! You have destroyed, at one stroke, a Sacred Obligation . . . the unquestioning Obedience of a Patient to his Physician. That is Rebellion. The Revolt of Ignorance against Authority! And in Medicine, as in

Society, such Behaviour must bring Chaos and Disaster. It cannot be tolerated. It must be nipped in the Bud. And here and now. At once. And without mercy. You've brought this on yourself. *I've done with you.* And so, believe me, when they hear of this, have all my Fellows.

ARGAN (*a cry of horror*): Oh no!

DR. PURGON: I wash my hands of you. And leave you to your Fate. Which—I may tell you—I don't envy you. . . . In a short while from now, probably in a matter of hours, you will fall into a state of A-Pepsia. From that to U-Pepsia. From U-Pepsia to Mee-Pepsia. Then Drypsi-Pepsia. And from that in a Condition of Bray-co-philia-Pepsia. And when the dread poison of that spreads into your every organ—as it must; then you will die—and *horribly!*

[*Argan collapses. Purgon strides to the door, where he turns.*]

One thing more——

ARGAN: No more! You've killed me! Isn't that enough!

DR. PURGON (*continuing*): And so that this parting should be absolutely final, here is the Deed of Gift I made in favour of my nephew for his approaching marriage to your daughter. (*He tears it into pieces, and throws it on the floor.*) So this is Farewell! I have nothing to leave you, but my Pity.

[*And he disappears, followed by the Apothecary.*]

ARGAN: Merciful Heaven! I'm done for! That's the end—I'm dying!

BÉRALDE: Brother, don't be a fool!

ARGAN: All those Pepsias—they're coming on already. I feel terrible.

ACT THREE

BÉRALDE: Ridiculous. Now, listen: Old Purgon's threats have as much chance of killing as his medicines have of curing you! Now's your chance to rid yourself of doctors—once and for all.

ARGAN: No No No. I *must* have a doctor to look after me!

BÉRALDE: Don't be ridiculous! (*Then suddenly, remembering.*) No. What am I saying! I was forgetting——

ARGAN: Eh?

BÉRALDE: *Of course you must have a doctor!*

ARGAN: Why! . . . Am I looking ill?

BÉRALDE: Terrible!

ARGAN: Aaah!!!

BÉRALDE: You must have a new one, who must find some new, and drastic, remedies for you; and not waste a moment of time.

ARGAN (*hopeless*): Where can we find one. They stick together, like the Leeches that they are! There's not a Doctor dare offend old Purgon. No. I'm finished.

TOINETTE (*entering*): There's a Doctor, Monsieur Argan, below; who's called to see you!

ARGAN (*too bemused to take in what she has said*): What was that?

TOINETTE (*repeating*): A Doctor come to see you.

ARGAN: Who?

TOINETTE: I haven't an idea!

ARGAN: What's his name?

TOINETTE: He wouldn't tell me.

ARGAN: What's he want?

TOINETTE: He wouldn't say that either. But he was very urgent.

ARGAN: Urgent?

TOINETTE: That he *must* see you. He's come to Paris, from abroad, only to visit *You*.

ARGAN: Very strange.

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

TOINETTE: It's stranger than that!

ARGAN: Stranger than *what*?

TOINETTE: You won't believe it, Monsieur Argan, nor you, Monsieur Béralde——

BÉRALDE: I'm sure I shan't!

TOINETTE: I opened the door to him; and there he stood. . . . If I didn't know my mother didn't have two of us at once, I could have sworn he was my twin.

BÉRALDE: Your *twin*!

TOINETTE: About my age; the same height; and—as I stand here—the spitten image of me!

ARGAN: How did you know he was a doctor?

TOINETTE: He told me so.

ARGAN: Maybe of Philosophy. Or Music—I've had enough of *them*!

TOINETTE: Oh No—of Medicine. He wore his doctor's things. Hat and Cloak, and has a little beard, but, even so, I do assure you, the likeness is almost unbelievable.

BÉRALDE (*to Argan*): Well, as he's a doctor, he seems an answer to your prayer. You'd better see him.

ARGAN (*to Toinette*): Ask him to come up.

[*Toinette goes.*]

(*To Béralde.*) What do you make of it?

BÉRALDE: Very mysterious.

ARGAN: Well! . . . We shall see.

BÉRALDE: We shall! . . . But what?

[*They wait. . . . Toinette comes sweeping into the room, in all the rig-out of a Doctor; which we have already seen on Doctor Diaforus, and his son, and Doctor Purgon—the tall hat and gown. She has, too, a small beard. And it is essential that the beard should look as real as possible, and can be removed and replaced as quickly as possible.*]

ACT THREE

Now, she is putting on the act of her life. . . . She stops, and regards the two men who are staring at her.]

TOINETTE (*as the Doctor*): And which of you two gentlemen, if I may make so bold to ask, is the great and famous Monsieur Argan?

ARGAN: *Me!* But I'm not famous.

TOINETTE (*as the Doctor*): You be-little yourself. Whenever and wherever Doctors are gathered together to discuss their Art, your case is spoken of!

ARGAN: You don't say so!

TOINETTE: So many ailments, so much Disease in one frail body. You are, good Monsieur, medically speaking, the Wonder of the Age!

ARGAN: Good gracious me!

TOINETTE: Only the other day, lecturing to my students in Milan, I spent three hours on you. I know you inside-out. From head to foot.

ARGAN: This is very surprising. May I ask your name?

TOINETTE: That, I am afraid I cannot tell you. I, too, am not unknown. My fame, like yours, is international. I have indeed cured every known disease—as well as several others. If it were known that I was here in Paris, I should be besieged by every doctor seeking my advice. And I'm only here for a few hours, quite incognito, especially to visit you.

ARGAN: I'm sure I'm very honoured. . . . (*Then, suddenly, he seems to see Toinette in her make-up . . . he remains for a long moment, dead still, staring at her; then to himself.*) Extraordinary! *Most Extraordinary.* . . .

TOINETTE: May I ask *what* is extraordinary.

ARGAN: Your likeness to my maid.

TOINETTE: Indeed! You don't say so! She herself said something about it to me when she let me in.

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ARGAN: It's more than extraordinary! It's staggering! . . . Brother, what do you say.

BÉRALDE (*pretending to hesitate*): Um. . . . Yes. . . . I can see what you mean. Yes. There *is* some slight resemblance.

ARGAN: Slight! It's unbelievable!!

BÉRALDE (*moving between Argan and Toinette*): My dear fellow, you're making yourself ridiculous! We all have two eyes; a nose; a mouth. And if the eyes are something of the same colour, the nose something of the same shape, the mouth something of the same size—and in the same face, all these features have something of similarity, why then the "likeness" can be—to say the least—at first sight, surprising.

ARGAN: I don't know what you're talking about! This isn't a "likeness"—it's the same face. (*He pushes him aside.*) Out of the way. I want to have another look. . . . (*Which he does. Then:*) Young Doctor—if that's what you really are—will you do me a favour.

TOINETTE: I'm at your service, Monsieur Argan.

ARGAN: Come nearer.

TOINETTE: I can see you quite well from here.

ARGAN: But I can't see you. And I want a closer look. Much closer!

TOINETTE: If you'll excuse me, as it seems I may be here some little while, I must speak to my coachman—he can feed the horses.

[*Toinette disappears out of the door; but in the few moments that it takes her to slip off the hat, cloak, and beard, she puts her head in again through the door, as herself.*]

Did you call?

ARGAN: Not me.

TOINETTE (*coming into the room*): Nor you, Monsieur Béralde?

ACT THREE

BÉRALDE: No, no—I didn't.

TOINETTE: Funny thing! I could have sworn I heard you—Where's that doctor?

ARGAN: Gone to see his coachman.

TOINETTE: Is he coming back?

BÉRALDE: Of course! Why shouldn't he?!

TOINETTE: Well, in that case—and as you don't want me—— (*and she starts off hurriedly towards the door.*)

ARGAN (*shouting after her*): Here! Hi! Come back. Stay here!

TOINETTE: What for?

ARGAN: I'm getting to the bottom of all this!

TOINETTE: Of all what?

ARGAN: This incredible likeness.

TOINETTE: But didn't I tell you—I couldn't believe my eyes.

ARGAN: And nor can I! So till he comes back, you stop where you are!

TOINETTE: I've got my work to do.

ARGAN: Never mind your work.

TOINETTE: But I'm cooking your dinner.

ARGAN: That can wait.

TOINETTE: Can it! You won't get any dinner—it'll burn!

ARGAN: Eh! (*He hesitates for a moment, and then adds:*) Well—let it burn!

[*Toinette makes a gesture of despair towards Béralde—unnoticed by Argan . . . and they wait!*]

BÉRALDE: You know, I have an idea that while Toinette is here, he won't come back at all!

TOINETTE: Really, Monsieur Béralde! What makes you say that?

[*Argan gives a dry and enigmatical laugh—which turns into a cough.*]

ARGAN: Get me a glass of water!

TOINETTE (*making for the door, in a rush*): Yes, I'll get you one.

ARGAN (*yelling after her*): Where are you going? I said, a glass of water—from my table.

TOINETTE: Oh! (*So she returns and pours him out a glass of water.*)

ARGAN (*searching among his bottles*): Now, where are my drops?

TOINETTE (*off to the door again*): I've got 'em in the kitchen.

ARGAN (*yelling after her again*): No—I've got 'em here.

TOINETTE: Oh! (*So, again, foiled, she returns to pour out his drops; and again they wait. . . .*)

BÉRALDE: He's taking his time.

TOINETTE (*interrupting*): I know what's happened!

ARGAN: Eh?

TOINETTE: He's *lost*!

ARGAN: Lost?

TOINETTE: In this great rambling house; he'd never find your room; he's probably roaming about the passages. I'll go and find him!— (*And she makes for the door!*)

ARGAN (*again, yelling after her*): Here! Hi! Come back.

BÉRALDE: Really, brother, I think she may be right! And if you lose this doctor, your last chance has gone!

ARGAN: Oh! (*To Toinette*): Well, I'll not let you leave this room, unless you swear to me, that if you find him, you'll come back with him.

TOINETTE: Oh yes, I'll swear to that!

[*She disappears out of the door; and, at once, we hear her voice, speaking loudly as the Doctor.*]

ACT THREE

Oh thank you! Thank you very much!! I *am* relieved to see you. (*Then, as herself:*) I came to find you, sir. I thought you might be lost. (*As the Doctor:*) Indeed I was! That's very kind of you. So many passages—I thought I should never be seen again! And so many mysterious doors! (*As herself:*) This is Monsieur Argan's door. (*As the Doctor:*) I thought it must be, but I wasn't certain. (*As herself:*) And you'll find him inside, waiting for you. . . . I'm just going to the kitchen, to take his dinner out of the oven; but I'll be back in a moment. (*She enters as the Doctor.*) What a charming Maid you've got. So pretty, too. So kind of her to come and fetch me. You're very fortunate. (*She advances into the room; and before Argan can say anything, she launches, as it were, a verbal offensive of her own.*) Now, Monsieur Argan. I have a question to put to you. You alluded to me, a few minutes ago, as a young Doctor. . . . *How old do you think I am?*

ARGAN: How old?! . . . Well! . . . I should say . . . (*Then with an unusual edge of shrewdness.*) about the same age as that "charming"—*and very cunning*—Maid of mine!

TOINETTE (*laughing it off*): Oh but you're very wrong. I'm nearing eighty!

ARGAN (*quite taken aback*): Eighty!!!

TOINETTE: You see, I'm my own Doctor. I treat myself. I take my own Medicines. And I have discovered, among other things, the Secret of Eternal Youth!

ARGAN: Well, I must say, for eighty you're a very fine young—old—fellow! And *now*, my Venerable Young Sir, I have a question to put to you. . . . (*He pauses for a moment.*)

TOINETTE: Yes.

ARGAN: *Where's Toinette?? Why hasn't she come back???*

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

TOINETTE (*suddenly shouting at him*): Open your mouth.

ARGAN (*again taken by surprise*): Eh??!

TOINETTE: I said—Open Your Mouth!

[*He does.*]

Put out your tongue!

[*He does.*]

Shut your Mouth!

[*He does; but opens it again to speak; but before he can get a word out, she fires a question at him, which he can't help answering!*]

Do you ever have headaches?

ARGAN: Very often.

TOINETTE: Palpitations?

ARGAN: Frequently.

TOINETTE: Occasional stomach pains?

ARGAN: Nearly all the time.

TOINETTE: *Exactly* as I foresaw.

ARGAN (*suddenly bursting out*): It's no good!

BÉRALDE (*butting in*): Brother, what's no good?

ARGAN: I don't believe it.

BÉRALDE: Don't believe what? . . .

ARGAN: I'm being made a fool of!!

TOINETTE (*with an air of Immense Authority*): Really, Monsieur Argan, enough of this ridiculous obsession! I shall begin to think your mind is going, and there's no hope for you. (*But as she says this, she moves behind the screen, where Argan cannot see her; and takes off her little beard, Hat and Gown; continuing to speak as she does so.*) I'm mixing a Medicine for you; one that I take myself—it will restore your Youth. One dose every

ACT THREE

day for the next week, and every day you will lose five years.

ARGAN (*unimpressed*): That's as may be! But I want to see Toinette!

[*He is leaning as far as he can, out of his chair, towards his right; in a quite unsuccessful attempt to see behind the screen. . . . Toinette, as herself, comes from behind the screen to his left—so that he is unaware that she is there. She leans across the chair to touch his arm.*]

TOINETTE (*as herself*): It's all right, Monsieur Argan; here I am! I've taken your dinner out of the oven—it wasn't burnt. And now I'll just run back and keep it hot for you; so that you can have it the moment he's gone. (*And she starts off towards the door.*)

BÉRALDE: Well, brother?

[*Argan turns towards Béralde; which enables Toinette to dart back behind the screen. At once, she begins talking as the Doctor.*]

TOINETTE (*as the Doctor, shouting*): Hi, girl! Don't run away! Where are you off to? . . . Here; come here. I want your help. . . . I'm going to give your Master his first dose now. . . . I'll leave the other six doses here with you—but I want you to watch me mix it. . . . So . . . hold the glass for me . . . very steady . . . that's right. . . . This needs careful measuring. . . . One drop too little, or a drop too much—a Matter of Life and Death!

ARGAN: Extraordinary. I never could have believed if I hadn't seen them together!

[*Toinette appears from behind the screen as the Doctor, carrying the dose of Medicine.*]

TOINETTE (*as the Doctor, giving it to him*): Drink this. And I make only one stipulation. During this next week, you must rest. And rest *completely*. No outside activities or distractions of *any* sort. None Whatever. Neither for Business or Pleasure; Social or Family reasons. Not much to ask—and all important. Monsieur Béralde, will you see to that.

BÉRALDE: Indeed I will.

TOINETTE: Good.

ARGAN: Yes, but——

TOINETTE (*as the Doctor*): *Drink!*

[*Argan does.*]

(*As the Doctor, taking the glass from him.*) Girl! Take this glass; wipe it up carefully; then you can go. . . . It's possibly a little late to restore your Youth; but follow my instructions, and I can promise you a Vigorous Middle-Age! Goodbye!! (*And she seizes and grips his hand.*)

ARGAN (*because of the suddenness and strength of the grip*): *Won'!!!!*

TOINETTE: Did that hurt??

ARGAN: Well. . . . Yes. It did—a bit.

TOINETTE: That arm's no use. I'd have it off!

ARGAN: OFF???

TOINETTE: It's drawing the strength from all that side of your body. You'll do better without it!

ARGAN: WITHOUT IT??

TOINETTE: Do your eyes ever water?

ARGAN: Considerably.

TOINETTE: I'd have one of them out! It doesn't matter which—you'll see better with the other!

ARGAN: Yes—but. . . .

TOINETTE: I'll send a Surgeon to you. He can do both Operations at once. (*And she strides to the door;*

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where she turns.) One more question—who's your Doctor?

ARGAN: Doctor Purgon.

TOINETTE: Purgon! What a *Disaster*!! The worst doctor in Paris—with two exceptions!

BÉRALDE: And who are they?

TOINETTE: An old fellow called Diaforus, and his son. *(To Argan.)* D'you know them?

ARGAN: Well, yes—I do.

TOINETTE: I'm sorry to hear it. Old Diaforus isn't a Doctor—he's a Murderer. And his son's a Half-Wit. My last word to you is a Solemn Warning. *Have nothing to do with them!* Either as Doctors, or people. They'd be a Menace to your health and happiness. Keep clear of them—and as you value your life, stop quiet, here, in your room.

[And she sweeps out of the door.]

BÉRALDE: There's a doctor for you!

ARGAN: You disapprove of doctors!

BÉRALDE: This one was different.

TOINETTE *(re-entering, as herself)*: Well! That Doctor! How old did he say he was?

BÉRALDE: Eighty.

TOINETTE: He's been trying to feel my pulse!!

ARGAN: What's wrong with that? It's what all doctors do.

TOINETTE: He has his own ideas as to where the pulses are!

BÉRALDE: At eighty! Brother, you should take heart! You remember what he promised you—a vigorous middle-age. There'll be no holding you!

ARGAN: A fat chance I should stand—with one arm and one eye!

BÉRALDE: Oh don't worry about that. That's unimportant!

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ARGAN: Unimportant!!!

BÉRALDE: When the Surgeon comes, send him away.

ARGAN: Can I?

BÉRALDE: Of course you can. As long as you take his medicine and stop here in your room, absolutely quiet, for at least a week! I shall see to that.

ARGAN: But what about this marriage?

BÉRALDE: After what you heard about old Diaforus, and his half-wit son, I presume that's off.

ARGAN (*doubtfully*): Well. . . . Possibly! . . . Purgon withdrawing his money makes a big difference. (*With decision.*) She'll have to be a Nun.

BÉRALDE (*this time completely taken by surprise*): A what??!

ARGAN: A Nun.

BÉRALDE: A Nun???

ARGAN: My wife has wished it. Now she shall have her way.

BÉRALDE (*with growing, and quite real indignation*): Your wife has wished it! For God's sake, *why*?

ARGAN: That's no concern of yours. My wife has expressed a wish; and since my own plan has failed, that's good enough for me.

BÉRALDE (*now really angry*): Really, this is too much! I must speak my mind. If there's one thing that enrages me more than your Infatuation for your Doctors, it's your utter blindness about your wife!

ARGAN: *What's that?*

BÉRALDE (*still white hot*): I've always meant to say it. Now it's been said! The way you fall headlong into any trap that woman sets for you.

TOINETTE (*unexpectedly putting on another act*): Oh no, Monsieur Béralde. How can you say so! Madame would *never* set a trap for him. She *loves* him. She *adores* him. If you could see them together—like two sweethearts.

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ARGAN: Well said, Toinette. I didn't expect it of you. You're a good girl. Now, brother! If you won't believe it from me, perhaps you will from her.

BÉRALDE: Indeed I'll not. Neither from her, nor anyone.

TOINETTE: But Monsieur, I can prove it.

BÉRALDE: *Prove it? How?*

TOINETTE: Madame came home just a few minutes ago—she's coming up here now. Monsieur Argan, lie right back in your chair; and pretend you're dead! Then we shall all of us see how much she cares for you.

ARGAN: Pretend I'm dead! I don't like the idea at all!

BÉRALDE: Ah! When it comes to the point of *proof*, you're afraid to face it!

ARGAN: Indeed I'm not!

BÉRALDE: Then do as Toinette suggests.

TOINETTE: I hear her coming! Lie down, Monsieur Argan. (*To Béralde.*) And you, hide yourself here—(*She pushes him behind the screen. They wait . . . Argan sits up again!*)

ARGAN: Only a few moments! We musn't keep her in suspense! The shock might kill her!

TOINETTE: Yes, yes, yes—only a few moments. But lie down, lie—she's coming.

[*Again they wait . . . and again Argan suddenly sits bolt upright!!*]

ARGAN: There's no danger in pretending to be dead?

TOINETTE (*running at him*): No. No. No. *Lie down!*

[*And Toinette gives Argan a great shove, which sends him back sprawling helpless in his great chair—just as Béline appears in the doorway, and Toinette sets up a great wailing.*]

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

BÉLINE (*still in the doorway*): Toinette!!! (*Toinette wails louder.*) TOINETTE!!! (*Toinette makes it possible for Béline to be heard.*) . . . Whatever is it?? Why this caterwauling?

TOINETTE: Oh Madame! A dreadful thing has happened!

BÉLINE: Dreadful? What?

TOINETTE: The Master! Oh, the poor Master!!

BÉLINE: What about him?

TOINETTE: I can't bear to tell you.

BÉLINE: Tell me.

TOINETTE: He's *dead*!

BÉLINE: Dead???? . . . My husband *dead*?

TOINETTE: Oh quite! Dead as a door-nail! I came in here just now, and there he was; stretched out, just as you see him. Cold. And stark. And lifeless. His poor heart stopped!

[*For a long moment Béline remains standing where she is in the doorway . . . then comes slowly into the room; and sits down; she seems dazed, as if she hadn't taken in what she had heard. Toinette begins to wail again.*]

BÉLINE: Really, Toinette! I don't know what *you've* got to make such a fuss about!

TOINETTE: Madame, I can't help crying!

BÉLINE: Oh don't be ridiculous! Now that the old fool can't hear us, at least we can be honest. It's a good riddance! What earthly use was he to anyone! . . . His endless illnesses! The ceaseless "Treatments". Revolting, most of them! There were times I didn't know how to bear it. . . . Now it's over. Well, thank Heaven for that!

[*Very suddenly, Argan sits bolt upright! Béline screams; and Béralde moves from behind the screen. After the scream, there is a moment's utter silence. . . . Then:*]

ACT THREE

TOINETTE: Would you believe it—the deceased not dead!

[With a great cry, Béline rushes from the room. It is then Argan who sets up a howling.]

ARGAN: Oh brother, brother, brother!!!

[His brother goes swiftly to him.]

Now I really do wish that I were dead. The one person in the world I was quite sure loved me! Did you hear!?

BÉRALDE: Indeed I did!

ARGAN: Now I've got nobody!

BÉRALDE: That's absurd—you've got a brother!

ARGAN: And you hate me!

BÉRALDE: Indeed I don't!

ARGAN: You think I'm an old fool!

BÉRALDE: That's a very different thing.

ARGAN: But I don't *want* to be thought a fool!

BÉRALDE: Then you shouldn't behave like one. . . .

And you have your daughters.

ARGAN: And they both hate me!

TOINETTE: Oh *no*, dear Monsieur Argan—Louise is far too young to know whether she loves or hates; and my dear mistress Angelica loves you with all her heart!

ARGAN: You're only trying to comfort me!

TOINETTE (*running towards the door*): Quickly! Lie down again! Angelica's coming! You may hear something else that'll surprise you.

[Argan flops back again in his chair; Béralde hurries again behind the screen; and Toinette sets up another bout of wailing. . . . Angelica appears in the doorway.]

THE IMAGINARY INVALID

ANGELICA: Toinette! *Whatever* is it?

TOINETTE: Oh my dear mistress—such a disaster!

ANGELICA: Disaster?

TOINETTE: Oh your poor father—your poor *dear* loving father!

ANGELICA: My *what*?!

TOINETTE: Your poor dear loving father. That's what I said! And well you know it's true!

ANGELICA: Well—what's the matter with him?

TOINETTE: He's dead!

ANGELICA: DEAD???!

TOINETTE (*repeating what she had said before*): I came in here, just now, and there he was—stretched out—just as you see him now; cold and lifeless—his poor heart stopped—— (*But all the time, as she speaks, she is making the most violent signs to Angelica, shaking her head and pointing to Argan, to make Angelica understand it is not so . . . after a few moments of bewilderment, Angelica "gets it".*)

ANGELICA (*as if utterly heart-broken*): My father dead!! Oh no. It's more than I can bear.

[*Through the open door, she beckons for someone to enter—as she continues.*]

And to think, Toinette, that he has gone from us, when he was angry with me!

[*Cléante appears in the door-way.*]

TOINETTE (*loud, for Argan's benefit*): Why, here's Monsieur Cléante!

CLÉANTE: Angelica!

ANGELICA: Don't speak to me!

CLÉANTE: But my beloved!——

ANGELICA: I'm NOT your beloved. Nor can I ever be!

ACT THREE

CLÉANTE: For Heaven's sake—What's happened?

ANGELICA: My father——

CLÉANTE: I've come to see him——

ANGELICA: Well—there he is! Look at him! Look! He's dead.

CLÉANTE: DEAD???

TOINETTE: Dead as Mutton.

[*During this, signs have passed between them, to show that Cléante realises the situation.*]

CLÉANTE (*now starting on his "act"*): What Catastrophe! What utter Catastrophe!! Just when—on your wise Uncle's advice—I'd come to ask him for your hand in marriage.

ANGELICA: No! I could never marry without my father's consent. And that he can never give. . . . But he *would* have done. He could be strict, but he was *just*; and human; and so *kind*! Oh, my beloved father, if I could only bring you back to life, what happiness for all of us.

[*Upon which, Argan suddenly sits bolt upright—and both Angelica and Cléante make the same appropriate reactions!*]

TOINETTE: Oh Mistress Angelica! You must be some kind of Saint—you've worked a Miracle!

ARGAN: Don't talk such drivel! You know as well as I do, it was a trick.

ANGELICA: A trick! Oh father, how *could* you?! What have I said! What have you heard me say?!

ARGAN: Well it was a surprise, I don't mind telling you.

BÉRALDE: But after hearing your wife, you'll hardly wish to follow her instructions; and after hearing your daughter, I can't believe you'll deny her anything.

CLÉANTE: Monsieur Argan, I ask your daughter's hand.

TOINETTE: Oh, dear Monsieur Argan, you can't say No!

ARGAN: Can't I?! You don't know what I can say! Dammit, I've been dead twice within the last few minutes; and had the two biggest shocks of all my life. I hardly know what I'm saying myself! (*To Cléante.*) So you want to marry my daughter?

CLÉANTE: Yes, yes I do.

ARGAN: But she can't marry a Music-Master.

CLÉANTE: I'm not a Music-Master.

ARGAN: But you said you were.

CLÉANTE: Oh . . . yes . . . so I did.

ARGAN: But why?

CLÉANTE: It was a trick.

ARGAN: Outrageous! If there's anything I disapprove of—it's a Trick!

BÉRALDE { *(together, in* } Really, brother!

TOINETTE { *loud protest* } Oh Monsieur Argan.

ARGAN (*cutting them short*): All right, all right—enough of that!! (*Turning to Cléante.*) You're not a Doctor by any chance?

CLÉANTE: No.

ARGAN: Pity. If you'd been a Doctor, you could have had her.

CLÉANTE: Then I'll become one!

BÉRALDE: I have a better idea.

ARGAN: You and your ideas!!

BÉRALDE: Become a Doctor yourself!

ARGAN: *Me?!*

BÉRALDE: Why not?!

ARGAN: And what do I know of Illness and Disease?

BÉRALDE: What do you need to know? Except about your own? And about those, you know more than any man in Paris—a Doctor or Layman.

ACT THREE

ARGAN: That's true enough.

BÉRALDE: And only this afternoon you had an example—that vigorous young Doctor of eighty, who treated himself.

ARGAN: But I know no Latin.

BÉRALDE: You'll pick it up in no time. And, with a smattering of it, everything you say will sound a Pearl of Wisdom.

ARGAN: But how do I become a doctor??

BÉRALDE: Easily! A simple Ceremony that can be performed here and now.

ARGAN: Here and now?!

BÉRALDE: I happen to know that in the house next door, there is a meeting of the Faculty! Toinette, away with you! and invite them here at once!

(Toinette, bewildered as to what he means, stands hesitating; he continues.)

And you, Angelica, and you, Cléante—both of you—go with her——

[But for the moment both Angelica and Cléante hesitate—wondering where they are to go! He adds:]

I'll follow, in a moment, to explain!

[At which they all make their way from the room.]

(Going to his brother.) Now, brother, this is the greatest moment of your life! In a few minutes you will be Doctor Argan! I must go and summon the Faculty and you must be alone for a few moments, to prepare yourself for the Ordeal!

ARGAN: *Ordeal!!?*

BÉRALDE: My dear fellow, there can be no sort of

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Achievement, without some kind of Ordeal. (*He hurries to the door, where he turns to say:*) The Ceremony, of course, will be in Latin!

ARGAN: Latin!!

BÉRALDE: You must do your best!

[*He disappears through the door. Argan is alone, apprehensive . . . then he moves about the room . . . and ends up before his long row of medicine bottles. He consults them. . . . Then, to himself:*]

No; I'll have to wait till I'm a doctor—I don't know which to take. . . .

[*Suddenly, the door bursts open and eleven people—in fact, the rest of the cast!—come into the room. They are all disguised in tall hats and flowing gowns of the Medical Faculty, and each carries an outside instrument connected with the profession. They form a ring round Argan, and circle round him chanting and singing. The tune should be a simple one, gay and exciting—with a phrase capable of repetition at an ever-increasing crescendo.*]

THE ELEVEN (*circling and chanting*):

Here we are—Hic nos sumus

Omnes Learnèd Doctori,

Eminent Professiores,

Clever, skilful Surgeoni,

Venerable Physicians,

Every kind of Medici.

[*One of the figures—in fact, Béralde—breaks from the circle to confront Argan.*]

THE FIGURE: Invalid Imaginarius

You must answer questions various.

ACT THREE

[He rejoins the ring, and again they circle and chant.]

THE ELEVEN: Omnes Learnèd Doctori
Eminent Professiorés
Venerable Physicianes
Every kind of Medici.

[Another figure breaks from the circle, to stand in front of Argan.]

2ND FIGURE: Answer why the drug called Opium
Doctors all prescribe as Dope-i-um.

ARGAN: Why? . . . Because, non disputandum.

[The circle raises a cheer at his Latin. Thus encouraged, Argan continues.]

Et, quod erat demonstrandum.

[Another cheer! More encouraged Argan goes on.]

Opium is well known to Omnibus
As the remedy for Insomnibus.

[The circle dances more excitedly round him, perhaps joining hands or arms, and the tune increasing in volume and pace.]

THE ELEVEN: Excellentē! Excellentē!!
Argan is Intelligent
Vivat, vivat, vivat Argan
He knows all the doctor's Jargon.

[Another figure breaks from the circle.]

3RD FIGURE: Answer, why for Gripes and Fever

Doctors order Laxitiva.

ARGAN: Why, because non disputandum

Et, quod erat demonstrandum—

Enema administrare

Et Emetica donare

Purgitiva praescribere

Ergo Purgo!

THE ELEVEN (*dancing round more and more wildly*):

Jubilate! Jubilate!

Vivat, vivat, vivat, Argan.

[*Another figure disengages from the circle.*]

3RD FIGURE: What for Bile and Bad Odorum

Boils of every Categorum?

ARGAN: Ergo Purgo.

[*Again the circle swirls.*]

THE ELEVEN: Jubilate! Jubilate!

Vivat, Vivat, Vivat, Argan!

4TH FIGURE: Answer now without Erratum

What the Learned Facultatum

Recommends for Diabolicus

Collywobbles, and the Colicus.

ARGAN: Ergo Purgo.

[*Another circle of ever-increasing ecstasy.*]

THE ELEVEN: Jubilate Jubilate

Vivat, vivat, vivat, Argan!

[*Two more figures disengage, hand in hand—they are Angelica and Cléante.*]

5TH FIGURE (*Angelica*): What for Bunions, Corns, and
Callouses,

ACT THREE

Dandruff, Doldrums, and Paralysis?

6TH FIGURE (*Cléante*):

Measles, Mumps and Laryngitis,

Rigor Mortis and St. Vitus?

ARGAN: Ergo Purgo.

THE ELEVEN (*in a final frenzy*):

Jubilate Jubilate

Vivat, vivat, vivat, Argan!

7TH FIGURE (*holding high both his arms*): *Nunc Silentium!*

[*An exaggerated silence and expectancy falls. The 7th Figure is Old Diaforus, and he makes the most of it.*]

7TH FIGURE (*Diaforus*):

You have made correct responses

Honi soit qui mal y pense

Now before this High Assemblibus

—One of you; and all of us—

To uphold our Facultatē

Steadfastly with Dignitatē

Swear!

THE ELEVEN: Swear, swear——

ARGAN: I swear.

8TH FIGURE (*Thomas Diaforus*):

Down the sink with all Remedia

Not in our Encyclopaedia.

9TH FIGURE: You may cure, or you may bury 'em,

But you get your Honorarium.

10TH FIGURE: Be known as General Practicionarius

On the Medical Registrarius.

11TH FIGURE: Give him his Hat of Learning

And his Scholar's Robe.

[*They put on his Robe and Hat and then pay homage.*]

1ST FIGURE: Mumbo.

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2ND FIGURE: Jumbo.

3RD FIGURE: Hic.

4TH FIGURE: Haec.

5TH FIGURE: Hocum.

6TH FIGURE: Purge 'em.

7TH FIGURE: Bleed 'em.

8TH FIGURE: Choke 'em.

9TH FIGURE: Soak 'em.

10TH FIGURE: Novus Doctor.

11TH FIGURE: Quack. Quack. Quack.

ALL: Quack Quack Quack Quack Quack Quack Quack!

1ST FIGURE (*Béralde*):

The Ceremony is over!

And your state is changed.

No longer an Imaginary Invalid—

But, in your own right, “Doctor Imaginaire”.

[*And Béralde takes off his Hat and Gown.*]

ARGAN (*gazing at him in amazed bewilderment*): Brother!

[*Toinette has also thrown aside her doctor's get-up; and Argan sees her.*]

ARGAN: Toinette!!

[*He looks around him. Angelica and Cléante have also divested themselves of their Hats and Robes—and are in each other's arms!*]

ARGAN (*shouting at them*): Here! Hey! What's this??!

[*But before he can say another word, the two young people rush to him, one on each side.*]

ACT THREE

CLÉANTE (*shaking his hand*): A great scholar! I congratulate you.

ANGELICA (*kissing him*): A Doctor for a father—I'm so proud of you.

ARGAN: Quickly—Pen and Paper! Bring me Pen and Paper! Pen and Paper. (*They do so.*) I don't feel at all well—I must write myself out a Prescription!!

And as he does so——

The Curtain Falls

THE SPLENDID
OUTCASTS

by

ROSEMARY ANNE SISSON

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Applications for performances of this play must be made to Curtis Brown, Limited, 13 King Street, Covent Garden, London, W.C.2. No performance may take place unless a licence has first been obtained.

CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

SANCIA OF ARAGON, *widowed sister-in-law of Cesar
di Borgia*

PIETRO, *a poet*

BURCHARD, *Secretary in the Vatican*

LUCRETIA DI BORGIA

CESAR DI BORGIA, *afterwards Duke of Romagna*

ALFONSO D'ESTE, *son of the Duke of Ferrara*

ALFONSO OF ARAGON, *Duke of Biselli, nephew of the
King of Naples and Sancia's brother*

GIACOMO, *a member of the Papal Guard*

LUIGI, *a member of the Papal Guard*

MICHELLOTTO CORELLA, *a Captain*

ISABELLA GONZAGA, *sister of Alfonso d'Este,
Duchess of Mantua*

ERCOLE D'ESTE, *Duke of Ferrara*

*The action of the play takes place in Renaissance Italy,
first in Rome, and later in Ferrara.*

The Splendid Outcasts was produced at the Festival Theatre, Pitlochry, on June 6, 1959, with the following cast:

SANCIA D'ARAGON	<i>Elizabeth Richman</i>
PIETRO	<i>Simon Carter</i>
BURCHARD	<i>Roy Boucher</i>
LUCRETIA DI BORGIA	<i>Elizabeth Hart</i>
CESAR DI BORGIA	<i>Gordon Fairclough</i>
ALFONSO D'ESTE	<i>Peter Whitbread</i>
ALFONSO D'ARAGON	<i>Gary Hope</i>
GIACOMO	<i>Terence Lane</i>
LUIGI	<i>Jon Croft</i>
MICHELLOTTO CORELLA	<i>Victor Carin</i>
ISABELLA GONZAGA	<i>Una McLean</i>
ERCOLE D'ESTE	<i>Hamish Ronghead</i>

Play directed by Jo Dua
Settings by Robert Weaver

ACT ONE

Scene I

The Borgia Apartments in the Vatican.

At the back, and to the right, pillared archways give on to a painted gallery which leads to the rest of the Vatican. To the left is a doorway with rich hangings over it, before which Burchard sits at a desk, writing. On the other side of the room, Pietro sits in a huge, carved chair, one foot touching the ground, the other, from his lameness, hitched up short. Sancia stands by a tall balconied window, looking out. She turns and speaks to Pietro. There is an elaborate hidden mirth in all their conversation.

SANCIA: A Cardinal's hat is very wide.

PIETRO: Yes. It gives a good shade. But what young man desires to live in the shade?

SANCIA: I suppose the truth is that the Lord Cesar was never meant for the Church. He should have been a soldier. Though, of course,—(*demurely*)—a Cardinal is a soldier of God.

PIETRO: Yes. The devil is more fortunate.

[They both laugh. There is a brief silence, and Pietro speaks in a changed voice.]

The truth is that a Cardinal's hat is too narrow for the Lord Cesar's head—for that celestial, ambitious globe, his head. Have you ever thought, Donna Sancia, what a strange object is a man's head? In form and substance as rigid as a coconut. Cut it open, and its contents will spill out like a meat pudding. It sticks and lolls upon a straight bone and a sinewed column, and can travel nowhere without a pair of

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compasses beneath it, plotting out its path, foot by foot. Yet this same head, Donna Sancia, can soar like thistledown into the uncharted heavens, can plunge like lead into the infernal pit. Put a little seed of aspiration in it, and though to the woman who has held it on her breast all night it seems unchanged, yet within its narrow, bony framework it swells like the ocean and reverberates like the night sky singing among its spheres.

SANCIA: Well, so the Lord Cesar is ambitious. We all know that. But why not pursue his ambition *as* a Cardinal?

PIETRO: Oh, pooh! A Cardinal! Of his whole body, not so much as his forefinger has ever been dipped in that holy see. Besides, what is the good to him of being a Cardinal? It only leads to one superior office—and that place is taken. It is held by His Holiness, his father, who seems likely to live a long time yet. But if the Lord Cesar should marry the daughter of the King of Naples, then in time he might himself become King of Naples—in less time, perhaps, than the King of Naples thinks!

SANCIA: And you think he will marry Carlotta of Aragon?

PIETRO: How very intent you are upon the affairs of the Lord Cesar.

SANCIA: Naturally so. I am his sister-in-law.

PIETRO (*immediately amused*): Ah yes! I had forgotten *that* relationship.

[*Sancia looks quickly offstage, and then at Burchard.*]

SANCIA: I think you must be mad.

PIETRO: No, only lame. Why should you think I am mad?

SANCIA: It's only madmen who have no sense of danger.

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PIETRO: What should I be afraid of?

SANCIA: Of torture, if Cesar heard you. Even death, if he were angry enough. Aren't you afraid of that?

PIETRO: God has already tortured my body more than any man could. Pain is my bedfellow. Why should I be afraid of *her*? No, your sick men are your only brave men.

SANCIA (*returning into the room*): How can you say that? Isn't Cesar Borgia brave?

PIETRO: I was speaking of the courage of men, not of animals.

SANCIA (*really alarmed*): Oh, for God's sake, Pietro! Hold your tongue!

[*Pietro gets up and limps across the room.*]

PIETRO: Cesar Borgia is like the emblem of his house—a black bull. He is young, and his skin shines, and when he walks, he dances. He is like a young bull in the pasture. He looks constantly from side to side, searching for danger and beguiled by it. He rushes forward, determined to conquer, but he doesn't know what it is he conquers, or why. He gores it, and tosses it away from him, and never looks to see where it falls or whether it still threatens. He is courageous, because he has no habit of reflection, and he is cunning because he has never learnt to trust, but if he ever becomes old, and is penned up with a ring through his nose—ah, then we shall learn how brave he is, and how much he understands.

[*Sancia sits down and smiles at him.*]

SANCIA: Well, no doubt that is very clever. But you had better not speak of him in such a way to his sister.

PIETRO: Ah, the Donna Lucretia—young and white and golden, with a garland of roses round her neck,

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and led to the sacrificial altar of marriage with no more apprehension than he rushes upon the bull-ring.
SANCIA: You shouldn't speak of her so! To know her is to love her.

PIETRO (*sardonically*): So I have heard!

SANCIA: Because she is gay and cheerful, and loves to dance——

PIETRO: She dances many measures, as I hear, and with some very—strange—partners.

SANCIA: That is a wicked slander, and you know it is! I should think you would be ashamed to repeat it!

PIETRO: Ashamed? We can't afford to be ashamed, for if we once began, where should we end? There was a time when the Church carried all our shame for us. Now we must bear it ourselves. If we run from virtue, and welcome vice, it's because it makes the burden of shame so much lighter if we pretend that it doesn't exist.

[*Lucretia comes in. She sees only Sancia, who stands up and comes towards her, standing between her and the window. She is tall and graceful, richly but discreetly dressed, her golden hair bound with gold fillets. Beside her, Sancia looks suddenly a little common. Burchard, at her entrance, rises, turns, bows, and waits attentively. Pietro draws into the curtain. As they talk, he silently steps onto the balcony and is bidden.*]

LUCRETIA: Sancia! I thought my brother was here. Burchard——

BURCHARD (*bowing*): Madonna.

LUCRETIA: Do you expect the Lord Cesar here to-day?

BURCHARD: Yes, Madonna. I understand that the Duke of Biselli was to accompany him here, and that he hopes that you would do them the honour of waiting upon them.

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

SANCIA: My brother coming here today!

[*Burchard bows.*]

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): Of all days, today.

SANCIA (*curious*): Is today different, Lucretia, from other days?

LUCRETIA: Does it seem the same to you?

SANCIA (*glancing at the window*): It is— (*She stops, startled not to see Pietro.*) It is fine enough.

LUCRETIA: Yes, the sun has been shining all day.

SANCIA (*smiling*): It very often does.

LUCRETIA (*in a low voice*): I almost wish it had not shone today. (*She waves her hand to Burchard, smiling.*) Very well, Burchard.

BURCHARD (*bowing*): Madonna.

[*He sits down and continues to write. Sancia glances at the window, uncertain what to do about Pietro. Lucretia moves across the room, lost in her thoughts.*]

LUCRETIA: I wonder why they made the goddess of love a woman.

SANCIA (*at once frivolously engaged*): Well, they could hardly make her a man—oh, well, there is Cupid, of course.

LUCRETIA: Venus is a courtesan, and Cupid is an urchin. Love is not like that.

SANCIA: What, then?

LUCRETIA: I don't know. Not man or woman or boy. Something more universal. Sunlight, perhaps.

SANCIA (*giggling*): Or moonlight.

LUCRETIA: No, not moonlight. The moon is a cold and lonely light, shining by itself in a dark sky. But the sun illuminates everything—like love.

SANCIA: Oh! Love for whom, Lucretia?

[*Lucretia laughing, takes a few dancing steps across the*

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

room, and turns, clapping her hands, still laughing, to look at Sancia.]

LUCRETIA: When I came into the room I had no intention of telling you. Oh, I am like a child who has been told a secret, and is so proud to have been entrusted with it, that she must at once tell someone about it! Love, love, charming little love! Is this what you are like after all?

SANCIA (*suddenly alarmed*): Hush, Lucretia! (*She motions towards Burchard.*) Aren't you afraid of him?

[*Lucretia smiles,*]

LUCRETIA: Burchard, can you keep secrets?

[*Burchard turns, rises and bows.*]

BURCHARD: I never hear secrets, Madonna.

LUCRETIA (*smiling to Sancia*): You see?

[*Burchard sits down again. Lucretia goes to the window. Sancia puts her hand to her mouth.*]

(*Looking out, and sighing.*) It looks just the same. (*She puts her hand on the curtain.*) You would think that there would be some difference—a golden dust, perhaps, rising from the streets and the walls and the roofs. But it is just the same. Oh, Rome! don't you know that I am in love?

[*Sancia looks at Burchard, thinks of Pietro and then still can't resist the question.*]

SANCIA: But, Lucretia—in love with whom?

LUCRETIA (*after a pause, turning away from the window*): I don't know.

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SANCIA: What?

LUCRETIA (*coming back into the room*): Have you ever watched the girls on the roof-tops on a holiday? I used to think that if I were not—who I am—I should like to be one of those girls, laughing at the soldiers in the street below. The girl laughs, and the soldier looks up at her and laughs back, riding along in the sunlight, with his hand on his hip. And when he has passed by, he turns in the saddle and looks back and smiles, and she smiles too, and for a moment they are happy, and sad, and wonderfully innocent, like Adam and Eve right at the beginning, when he first awoke and found her there, and they didn't think of what it meant, or what was to come, but found themselves alone together, there in the sunlight, and smiled.

SANCIA: Well, so?

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Well, so! (*She walks about, embarrassed and amused, moved, and yet laughing at herself.*) I was on the balcony of my father's apartments, quite early this morning. I thought I might see Cesar coming into the City. And I did see him, but he didn't look up. He was too busy talking to someone who was riding beside him.

SANCIA: Oh—my brother, perhaps.

LUCRETIA: I suppose so. Yes.

SANCIA: Well?

LUCRETIA: I had just turned to go inside, and then something made me look back, and I saw him—a young man riding along in the sunlight, and he looked up and saw me and smiled, and I smiled too.

SANCIA: Well?

LUCRETIA: That's all.

SANCIA: But—what was he like?

LUCRETIA: All golden in the sunlight, and his eyes were very blue.

SANCIA: But—what happened?

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LUCRETIA: I heard the horse's hooves on the square, and I felt the pommel under my hand as he turned in the saddle to look back at me, and the horse's mane against my fingers. It seemed as though St. Peter's and the Vatican fell away behind us, and the sunlight carried us on together. And then I felt the stone of the balcony warm under my hand, and the cold stone under my foot, and I was alone there above the square, and he was gone. (*She looks at Sancia and laughs.*) What happened? Nothing! Only love.

SANCIA: But, Lucretia, one can't fall in love like that, in a moment, without even speaking a word!

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): Can't one? Well, then, I'm not in love. But I'm sure of one thing. As I leaned over the balcony, I saw Love very close to me, and though I may never see him again, I shall never forget his face.

SANCIA: How will you find him again?

LUCRETIA: I shall never find him again. He rode by in the sunlight, and was gone.

SANCIA (*curious*): But if you should meet him, this soldier, would you make him your lover?

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): If I had so little wit as to do so, I should still have more wit than to tell you so!

CESAR (*speaking suddenly from the doorway*): Tell nobody your secrets, Lucretia, except me.

[*Sancia gives a little scream. Lucretia turns and cries out, joyfully.*]

LUCRETIA: Cesar! Cesar!

[*He comes forward. He is tall, strong and handsome, with dark hair. He is richly dressed, with at first sight nothing clerical about him. His long red cardinal's cloak is blue-lined and is turned up in a military style over his shoulders. His cardinal's hat hangs at his back. Lucretia runs*

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

towards him, and he clasps her in his arms, and then holds her away from him. Pietro moves quickly from behind the curtain to stand by the doorway.]

CESAR: My most beautiful sister!

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Of course, I am your *only* sister.

CESAR: Is the moon less beautiful because it shines alone in the sky? Donna Sancia.

[She curtseys to him as he turns towards her, releasing Lucretia.]

Your brother will be arriving shortly. Will you welcome him, and tell him we shall await his pleasure here?

SANCIA: Yes, my Lord.

[As she passes Cesar, he catches her hand. She looks quickly back at him. After a moment, he smiles and releases her. She hesitates, and then goes out. Lucretia looks amused. Cesar turns and sees Pietro.]

CESAR: Ha, Pietro! Come here! Lucretia, this is my little poet, Pietro. I found him in Naples, living in a hovel and writing like an angel. You must be good to him. Burchard!

[He goes to speak to Burchard. Pietro comes forward and kneels before Lucretia.]

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): So you are a poet?

PIETRO: Yes, Madonna. A poet. One who fills the idle hour with idle thoughts.

LUCRETIA (*quickly serious*): Oh no! Not that.

PIETRO: What then?

LUCRETIA: Everything we do is reflected upon a

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celestial crystal beyond our sight. A poet reminds us that it is so.

PIETRO: He is a kind of pocket-mirror.

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): Well, yes, if you will. A satiric poem is a cruel mirror, and a love poem is a kind mirror, but, anyway, I am a woman, Messer Pietro—I love a mirror.

PIETRO: I am sure that any mirror which reflected you must be a kind one.

LUCRETIA (*giving him her hand*): You are very kind to say so.

[*Pietro looks at her for a moment, and then kisses her hand.*]

CESAR (*speaking louder to Burchard*): Very well. Tell His Holiness that Este is coming here if he wants to see him.

BURCHARD: Yes, my Lord.

[*He goes out. Cesar returns, gesturing to Pietro, who goes out, bowing at the door, with his eyes on Lucretia.*]

CESAR: You've won Pietro's heart. He'll spend the rest of his life writing sonnets to your hair.

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): Oh, no, he is your poet.

CESAR: Well? What is mine is yours. We share everything, don't we, you and I?

LUCRETIA: Of course! (*She stops short, glancing at the window.*) Of—course. (*She smiles, as though unconsciously.*)

CESAR (*looking at her intently*): You are thinking of something I don't know about. What is it?

LUCRETIA: Nothing. A trifle. Nothing.

[*Cesar takes her hands in both of his.*]

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CESAR: Your thoughts are mine, Lucretia. Don't ever be secret with me. Don't ever deceive me.

[*After a second Lucretia smiles up at him.*]

LUCRETIA: How could I?

CESAR (*suddenly laughing*): You're right. You couldn't!

[*He releases her and walks away. Lucretia sits down, relieved. Cesar speaks suddenly.*]

CESAR: Who is this "soldier" you were talking about? (*He turns quickly to look at her.*)

LUCRETIA (*quickly, startled*): Oh—no one. A joke with Sancia. Nothing.

CESAR: M'm.

LUCRETIA: Will you—will you be staying in Rome for long?

CESAR: No. Not long. I shall probably be going to France.

LUCRETIA: To France?

CESAR: Carlotta of Aragon is at the Court of King Louis.

LUCRETIA: Then it's true——! (*She stops short.*)

[*Cesar smiles.*]

(*Laughing.*) There are always rumours about you. I try not to listen to them, but——

CESAR (*laughing*): It's the same with rumours as with a shop-keeper giving change. Now and then, by accident, he gets it right.

LUCRETIA: And you'll abandon your holy orders?

CESAR (*cheerfully*): On the nearest doorstep! It was my father's idea that I should become a Cardinal. It has never been the slightest use to *me*. Besides, as you've heard, I'm thinking of getting married.

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LUCRETIA: To Carlotta of Aragon.

CESAR: The King of Naple's daughter. Legitimate, too. Remarkable.

LUCRETIA: Will her father agree?

CESAR: I'm hoping to persuade him—with your husband's help. (*He sits down, idly.*)

LUCRETIA (*startled*): My——? You mean, Sforza.

CESAR (*impatiently*): Sforza? No! That business is over. The annulment is complete. You'll never hear of that again.

LUCRETIA: Then I'm to be——?

CESAR: Yes. (*Idly, smiling.*) Do you mind?

[*Lucretia gets up and walks away, and turns to smile at him.*]

LUCRETIA: I'd rather stay here with you.

CESAR: Don't worry. I will never let you go far away from me.

LUCRETIA: Who is it to be?

CESAR: Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Biselli.

LUCRETIA: Sancia's brother!

CESAR (*smiling*): Nephew of Federico of Naples. Alliances are like cherries, you know. They come in pairs and bunches. You marry Alfonso of Aragon. I marry Carlotta of Aragon. The Borgia family finds itself in the Kingdom of Naples. And then, you know how it is in a foreign city. One wanders about, seeing the sights and picking up little trifles.

LUCRETIA: Such as a crown?

CESAR (*elaborately surprised*): Well—yes! While Louis of France and Federico are playing pitch and toss with the crown of Naples, one might chance to pick it up. And if it should stick to one's fingers, the easiest way to get rid of it would probably be to put in on one's head.

LUCRETIA: But, Cesar, if Louis of France and Feder-

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ico of Naples are both claiming the throne, will they let you marry Carlotta of Aragon, which gives you a claim as well?

CESAR: I'm hoping that each of them will agree to it, to spite the other.

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Cesar!

[*There is the sound of guards presenting arms below. Cesar gets up.*]

CESAR: That's probably Alfonso of Aragon now.

LUCRETIA (*putting her hands to her hair*): Oh, is he coming here to see me?

CESAR (*sardonically*): No. He's coming here for us to see him! (*He goes towards the gallery.*)

LUCRETIA: Cesar!

[*He turns.*]

How soon should—When am I to marry him?

CESAR: If he can be useful to us, soon. If not, never!

[*He goes out. Lucretia gives a half-unconscious sigh, and moves to the window, and stands, looking out. Burchard silently returns. Lucretia turns to look at him.*]

LUCRETIA: Burchard.

BURCHARD: Madonna?

LUCRETIA: Burchard, sitting there all the time, writing, and listening as I'm sure you must, what do you feel about us?

BURCHARD: Nothing, Madonna.

LUCRETIA: Nothing? Don't you ever long to throw up your cap, and dash down the hill and join in the battle?

BURCHARD: No, Madonna. I would rather live to write about it.

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LUCRETIA (*turning back to the window*): I think if you care so little, what you write will not be very true.

[*Voices are heard before Cesar and Alfonso d'Este come in.*]

ESTE (*off*): The day of personal combat is over. Put one cannon in the field, and you can leave a hundred men behind.

CESAR (*off*): And will your cannon follow you to death and damnation, as your hundred men would?

[*They come in, still talking. Este is a tall, solid-looking man, well, but rather plainly dressed. He carries in his hands a miniature cannon.*]

CESAR: No, Don Alfonso, you and I will never agree about cannon.

ESTE: The day will come, your Eminence, when the number of men will be nothing. The strength of the weapons will be all.

CESAR: That day will never come. It's not the number of men which counts, but their loyalty. You will never summon loyalty from your cannon.

ESTE: Nor lose it neither.

[*They have stopped, intent on the argument. Este, turned away from the window, hasn't noticed Lucretia, who stands where she is, looking him slowly up and down. Cesar smiles.*]

CESAR: That miniature of yours, though, there's a delicate thing. Lucretia, you like toys. Come and look at this.

[*As she comes forward, Este looks momentarily surprised, but then bows to her impassively. She curtseys to him and comes near.*]

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(*Bending over it.*) Would it fire, this little creature, h'm?

ESTE: Certainly, my Lord, if it were loaded. It is an exact replica. I made it with my own hands.

CESAR (*putting the muzzle of the cannon against his breast*): Would it kill a man, this little piece of yours? Try it now, and see. Was that why you brought it here?

LUCRETIA (*snatching at it*): No, Cesar, no!

ESTE (*impassively*): This is a weapon of war, not of assassination.

CESAR (*still holding the cannon at his heart, and laughing*): What is the difference? One method is more wasteful than the other, that is all.

ESTE: One, perhaps, is also more honourable than the other.

CESAR (*amused*): To the dead man, an honourable bullet was as fatal as a dishonourable one. (*He holds the cannon out to Lucretia like a poised dagger.*) Here, look at it!

LUCRETIA (*drawing back*): No, no! I hate it!

CESAR (*laughing*): The Madonna Lucretia doesn't like your toy.

LUCRETIA (*recovering herself, and smiling*): I don't like toys that kill.

CESAR (*amused*): Nor the men who make them?

[*Lucretia is suddenly sobered. Este takes the cannon in his hands, bowing slightly, and looking coldly at Lucretia.*]

ESTE: My cannon will save more than they kill. When they are strong enough, no one will dare to attack me. Then there will be peace.

CESAR: Never believe it! Wars are made in the minds of men.

BURCHARD: My Lord.

CESAR (*turning*): Ah.

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[*He goes to speak to him. Lucretia takes a step or two away, and turns, smiling at Este.*]

LUCRETIA: Do you like Rome, Don Alfonso?

ESTE (*calmly*): I prefer my own city.

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Indeed!

ESTE: I imagine a man must always prefer the place where he is known.

LUCRETIA (*frivolously*): That must depend upon what is known about him. What is known about you, Don Alfonso?

ESTE: That I am incapable of paying compliments, or of making clever speeches.

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Oh dear! But you are right. It will be noticed more abroad. What man ever bothers to pay compliments to his wife?

ESTE: I have always considered that the chief benefit of marrying a woman is that one no longer has to rack one's brains to find pretty things to say to her.

[*Lucretia is momentarily nonplussed, not sure whether he is serious or not. Cesar turns away from Burchard.*]

CESAR: Don Alfonso, His Holiness will see you now. I'll come and—oh. (*Recalling something.*)

[*Sancia comes in.*]

CESAR: Donna Sancia, where is that brother of yours? God's blood, are we a set of serving-men, to wait about in anterooms at his pleasure?

[*Lucretia looks quickly from Este to Sancia.*]

LUCRETIA: Brother——?

SANCIA (*shocked, glancing over her shoulder*): My Lord, he is——

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CESAR: What? He's there, is he? Well—(*Mending the words, but not the tone.*) Well, ask the Duke of Biselli to honour us with his presence here. Uh?

SANCIA: Yes, my Lord. (*She goes out, along the gallery.*)

LUCRETIA (*dazed*): But, I thought— (*She looks from Cesar to Este.*) You said, "Don Alfonso". I thought that——

CESAR (*looking at her quickly, and laughing*): What? You thought this was the Duke of Biselli? (*Elaborately, smiling.*) Don Alfonso d'Este, son of the Duke of Ferrara. My sister, the most illustrious Lady Lucretia di Borgia.

[*Este bows slightly. Lucretia inclines her head.*]

I thought you knew him. I'd forgotten he hadn't been in Rome before. (*Laughing.*) Este lives all his life in Ferrara. He can't leave his foundry. The cannon cry at night if he's not there to pat their muzzles. And then, of course, he's newly-married, aren't you, Este? If it were not so——

[*He stops short, looking calculatingly from Este to Lucretia.*]

ESTE (*deliberately*): As you say, Your Eminence, I am newly-married.

CESAR: H'm.

[*Este glances at Burchard, still standing by the door.*]

ESTE: Perhaps I should not keep His Holiness waiting.

CESAR (*slowly*): No. You had better go. I'll follow you in a few minutes. (*He turns away.*)

[*Este goes to the doorway and turns and bows to Lucretia.*]

ESTE: Madonna.

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LUCRETIA (*gaily*): Goodbye, my Lord. I hope Ferrara may always prove a safe refuge from the penalty of being—too well-known!

[*She curtseys light-heartedly. Este bows again and goes out, followed by Burchard. The moment he is gone, Lucretia laughs and moves to join Cesar.*]

CESAR: Here comes Biselli. You must charm him. It shouldn't be difficult. He's a fool.

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Thank you!

CESAR (*laughing*): I mean he's not worth your best endeavours. If you marry him, you'll be able to lead him on a string, like a pet monkey. Este, now—

LUCRETIA: Is like a bear—and probably dances no better!

CESAR (*momentarily intent*): You don't like Este?

[*Lucretia looks, startled, towards the doorway, and back at him.*]

LUCRETIA: You don't mean that——?

CESAR: No. We need Ferrara, but we'll buy it at a cheaper price than your marriage.

[*Alfonso of Aragon comes in with Sancia. He is a fair-haired young man, handsome in a gentle way, richly and gracefully dressed.*]

We must have Naples. One way, and every way, we must have Naples.

SANCIA: My brother, my Lord.

CESAR (*turning*): Ah.

ALFONSO (*bowing*): Your Eminence.

CESAR (*making the introduction without mockery*): Don Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of Biselli. The illustrious Lady Lucretia di Borgia, my sister.

ALFONSO: Madonna. (*He bows.*)

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[*Lucretia stands for a moment, transfixed. Then she slowly curtsies, as though glad to hide her face. Cesar stands between them. In the conversation which follows, he and Lucretia, speaking the hidden family language, leave Alfonso awkwardly outside.*]

CESAR: Now may I depend upon it that the identity of our visitor is perfectly plain to you? This is not Don Alfonso d'Este, Duke of Cannon, this is Don Alfonso of Aragon, Duke of—— What is your weapon, Biselli?

ALFONSO (*at a loss*): My——? I am generally considered best with the rapier, my Lord—but——

CESAR: Don't be alarmed, I am not challenging you to a duel.

LUCRETIA: My Lord isn't asking you to name your weapon, but to weapon your name.

CESAR: It is the custom, you know, in the marriage-ceremony, for a naked sword to be held over the newly-married pair. Do you suppose that Este insisted on having a naked cannon held over him?

LUCRETIA: Or do you suppose they celebrated the nuptials in the foundry, and that he and his bride crawled underneath the cannon instead?

CESAR: Probably so. That is why the occasion has so impressed itself on his memory. (*Suddenly to Alfonso.*) But if *you* should be married, you would be satisfied with a rapier?

ALFONSO: I——

CESAR (*to Lucretia*): You see, it is as I said, Don Alfonso would make a less demanding husband.

[*Burchard comes in, pausing at the door.*]

BURCHARD: My Lord. (*Cautiously.*) Your presence is requested, my Lord.

CESAR: H'm? (*He turns to Alfonso, suddenly dropping*

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his air of pleasantry.) I have to leave you briefly. I suggest that you spend the time of my absence in writing that letter— (*elaborately and mockingly courteous*) if it would not be troubling you too much. (*Going towards the door.*) Burchard will show you where there is paper and pen. (*As he goes towards the door, Cesar lets fall the scarlet cloak from his shoulders and draws the hat up on to his head. He turns, suddenly a dignified and magnificent Cardinal.*) When I return, we will go to dinner.

[*Alfonso bows. Lucretia and Sancia curtsey. Cesar goes out.*]

BURCHARD (*holding the door open, and bowing*): My Lord.

LUCRETIA (*to Burchard*): Leave us.

BURCHARD: But, Madonna——

LUCRETIA: Leave us!

[*Burchard, in silence, bows and goes out. Lucretia turns and walks away, silently, clasping her hands. Alfonso, looking anxious and confused, glances at Sancia. She takes a breath to speak. Lucretia suddenly turns.*]

LUCRETIA: Leave us, Sancia!

SANCIA (*startled*): But——

[*She lets her breath go, curtseys, glances at Alfonso, and goes out. Lucretia goes to the window. She speaks without turning round.*]

LUCRETIA: Don Alfonso, you and I are to marry.

ALFONSO: Madonna, it is my hope.

[*Lucretia turns and looks at him.*]

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Oh no! To say you hope for

something, is to say that you would *choose* it. You and I, Don Alfonso, have no choice. We are to marry. It is arranged.

[*Alfonso bows, keeping his eyes upon her. With Cesar and Sancia gone, he seems now at ease. Lucretia moves about, returning to the window, and turns and looks at him with a sudden air of sparkling gaiety.*]

LUCRETIA: After all, marriage is not so *very* serious a business. Not as serious as love. (*She glances at him sideways.*) How silent you are! We Borgias always talk a great deal. They say it is to conceal our thoughts—and perhaps they are right!

ALFONSO: Your thoughts are your own, Madonna, but I hope that in time you will come to give me a small piece of your heart.

[*Lucretia laughs, teasingly, and moves about the room as she talks, touching the furniture, looking at the papers on the desk, pausing to look out of the window, but glancing all the time, with a careless watchfulness at Alfonso, who stands quite still.*]

LUCRETIA: Is that in the marriage-contract? Oh, if so, I must have that clause cancelled. The heart is not for leasing. One can contract to marry, but one can't contract to love.

ALFONSO: But I believe it is understood that married persons will——

LUCRETIA (*breaking in*): —will pretend to love each other? Oh yes, I believe so. But then, I have heard my brother say that unwritten clauses in treaties are rarely kept for long. No man can feign loving, any more than a coward can pretend to be a brave man. Shall we wait until the cold morning-hour of the marriage-bed, to discover that we have no heart for the encounter?

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[*Alfonso suddenly stiffens, looking at her searchingly.*]

ALFONSO: Madonna!

[*Lucretia turns away and speaks without looking at him.*]

LUCRETIA: Have you been in Rome long?

[*Alfonso looks puzzled, takes a breath to speak, and then answers in an expressionless voice.*]

ALFONSO: I rode into Rome this morning.

LUCRETIA (*carelessly*): Oh, did you? (*She moves about again.*) Love! It is as foolish to bind love to marriage as to say that a seafarer must never step on land. Because we are domiciled in marriage must we never take voyages abroad?

ALFONSO (*taking a step towards her*): Madonna——

LUCRETIA (*gaily over-riding him*): We may never be alone together again before our wedding-day. This is stolen time, and stolen time is like stolen money—one should never hoard it, but spend it, recklessly! (*She laughs, moving about, and avoiding his eyes.*) However much we may deceive each other hereafter, let us start with one great truth between us now! (*She comes close to him, looking at him.*) If I ask you a question, will you answer it, honestly?

ALFONSO: If you wish it—and if I can.

LUCRETIA: You can, and I do wish it. (*She turns away, puts her hand to her cheek, and closes her eyes for a moment. Then she looks back at him, laughing.*) Don Alfonso, isn't there in Naples some lady whom you love?

ALFONSO (*after a moment*): Since you ask me, Madonna, I must tell you that there is a lady whom I love.

[*Lucretia looks at him for a moment, and then turns away, laughing, and moves restlessly about.*]

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LUCRETIA: Well, of course. I was sure that there must be. We're young, but we aren't children. You see how right I was to ask you! For, if I hadn't, then you would have felt that you must pretend to love me, and then I should, perhaps, have pretended to love you, and—after all, why should we love each other? It isn't I whom you are marrying, but Lucretia di Borgia, who is married to the Duke of Biselli, and love doesn't lean upon titles.

ALFONSO: I am in love, but the lady is not in Naples.

LUCRETIA (*pausing to look at him*): Not——?

ALFONSO: She is in Rome.

LUCRETIA: But you have only just come to Rome.

ALFONSO: One can love in a moment.

LUCRETIA (*turning away*): Yes, one can. (*She moves again with increased energy.*) It doesn't matter. It is no concern of mine who she is. I won't ask you—Is she—is she dark or fair?

ALFONSO: Very fair.

LUCRETIA: And does she——? No! (*She walks about.*) If Cesar knew, he—— (*She stops.*) Don't ever tell me her name! If you value her life, don't ever tell me who she is!

ALFONSO: When I first loved her, I didn't know who she was.

LUCRETIA: You didn't——?

ALFONSO: I came to Rome; I saw her; and I loved her.

LUCRETIA: Don't tell me anything about it! (*She turns away.*)

[*Alfonso catches her by the arm.*]

ALFONSO: She was standing on a balcony.

[*Lucretia suddenly looks up at him.*]

A woman with golden hair.

[She catches her breath and turns her head away.]

I shall never forget that moment, though it meant nothing to you. When you smiled at me, the whole world gathered itself together and flung itself under my horse's hooves.

[She draws her arm away from his grasp, and stands quite still, listening, with a curious look of suspicious attentiveness.]

I didn't know who you were. You were so plainly dressed, and your hair all about your shoulders, like a child. I thought to myself—if she is one of the Lady Lucretia's waiting-maids, I am lost! And then, when I came into this room, and saw you here, and knew——!

[Lucretia moves a step away, clasping her hands. Alfonso walks away.]

Madonna, I understand what you have been saying to me. You are trying to tell me that there is someone else whom you love. I'm right, aren't I?

LUCRETIA (*slowly*): There is someone whom I love.

ALFONSO (*with sudden violence*): If I find him, I shall kill him.

LUCRETIA (*quickly smiling*): Oh no, don't kill him!

ALFONSO: Because your happiness depends upon him? So I am to be a complaisant husband. Why did you tell me? If you hadn't, I should have married you, and been happy!

LUCRETIA: And never known who it was I loved?

ALFONSO: Yes! Let's pretend that this conversation never took place, that I left the room when the Lord Cesar did, and never knew——

LUCRETIA: And never knew who it was I loved, standing on the balcony in the early morning.

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ALFONSO (*catching his breath*): Lucretia! Is it possible that you, too——? But when I came into the room, you gave no sign. You seemed so——

LUCRETIA: I was afraid.

ALFONSO: Afraid?

LUCRETIA: I was afraid that if you saw that I loved you, then you would pretend to love me, too. (*Wildly.*) But perhaps that's what you are doing! Perhaps I didn't really deceive you at all! Because of Cesar, you knew that you must——

[*Alfonso comes and takes her in his arms.*]

ALFONSO: Lucretia! (*He kisses her.*)

LUCRETIA (*sighing*): Oh! (*She looks up at him.*) Can it be as simple as this? (*She draws away.*) Nothing in my life has ever been simple before. Everything I have known since my earliest childhood has been infinitely involved. I was the illustrious lady Lucretia di Borgia, but no one said that I was the Pope's bastard. Guila Farnese was one of my maids of honour, but no one said that she was also the Pope's mistress. My brother, Giovanni, was found drowned in the Tiber—but no one said that he was murdered by—— (*She stops and crosses herself, looking quickly towards the door.*) You see, I can't say it, even to you! Is it possible now that *this* should be so simple—that you are to be my husband, and that I love you?

ALFONSO (*tenderly*): God meant us for each other.

LUCRETIA (*more doubtfully*): But Cesar——

[*She looks towards the door and then involuntarily moves closer to Alfonso.*]

ALFONSO: Are you afraid of him?

LUCRETIA: I don't know. I never had anything that he might take from me, until now.

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ALFONSO: Don't be afraid. I'll protect you. (*He puts his arm round her.*)

LUCRETIA (*gratefully*): Yes. As soon as we're married, we'll leave for Naples——

ALFONSO: I wish we could!

LUCRETIA: What?

ALFONSO: I am longing to show my beautiful wife in Naples. But we have to stay in Rome for a year after our marriage.

LUCRETIA: No! Why?

ALFONSO (*smiling*): It's in the marriage-contract.

LUCRETIA: But, why should it be?

ALFONSO (*smiling*): I suppose because your father and Lord Cesar won't part with you so soon. I can't wonder at it.

[*Lucretia draws away.*]

LUCRETIA: No, no! They love me, but not in that way. Why should they want us to stay here? We must get away from Rome! You must have it changed!

ALFONSO: I'm afraid I can't. I——

[*She looks at him, suddenly angry.*]

LUCRETIA: How can you protect me, if you have no power?

ALFONSO: I can't change the contract, because it was made between my uncle and His Holiness. We must stay in Rome. But you will be safe with me. There's nothing to be afraid of. I'll look after you. You believe that, don't you?

LUCRETIA (*wanting to believe it*): Yes! (*She goes to his arms.*) Yes, yes!

ALFONSO: Dearest Lucretia! Give me your hand.

[*Alfonso takes a ring off his little finger, puts it on her finger, and kisses it.*]

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May love always encircle our hearts, as my ring encircles your finger.

[*They kiss. Cesar opens the door and stands there. They start apart.*]

LUCRETIA: Cesar!

CESAR (*ignoring her*): Is the letter done already?

LUCRETIA: Oh—the letter——

ALFONSO: I'm afraid I haven't——

CESAR (*sharp and dangerous*): What? (*He comes into the room.*)

ALFONSO: I——

LUCRETIA: I delayed him, Cesar!

CESAR (*to Alfonso*): I believe I asked you to write a letter.

ALFONSO: Yes. I——

CESAR: Did you think I was just exercising my lungs? Taking in the air, perhaps, for the sake of expelling it again in the form of meaningless observations?

Uh? (*He strides to the door and shouts.*) Burchard!

[*Alfonso moves uneasily towards the door.*]

ALFONSO: I'm very sorry, my Lord. I didn't realise that it was urgent. I——

[*Cesar turns upon him.*]

CESAR: *My business is always urgent!*

[*Burchard comes to the door.*]

CESAR: Accompany His Excellency, Don Alfonso of Aragon, the illustrious Duke of Biselli, into the ante-room, give him pen and paper, and—a copy of the letter I drafted.

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BURCHARD: Yes, my Lord. (*He holds the door open and bows.*)

CESAR: Don Alfonso.

[*Alfonso hesitates, then bows to Lucretia, bows to Cesar, and goes out. Cesar shuts the door, and looks at Lucretia.*]

What are you doing, Lucretia? That fellow is to be your husband, not your lover! Where's Donna Sancia?

LUCRETIA: I sent her out.

CESAR: Did you have secrets to tell him? H'm?

LUCRETIA: No.

CESAR (*going towards her*): What did you say to him?

LUCRETIA: Nothing!

[*Cesar takes her hands and draws her sharply towards him. He feels the ring on her finger.*]

CESAR: What's this? I haven't seen this before. Did he give it to you?

LUCRETIA: No!

CESAR (*suddenly holding her close, his face near to hers*): If you ever lie to me again, I will strangle you!

LUCRETIA: Cesar!

[*He releases her and walks away.*]

CESAR: It's not too late to stop this marriage.

LUCRETIA: But—why should you?

CESAR: I'm not sure it's worth having anyway. He's too weak to be much use to us.

[*Lucretia takes a startled breath of protest, but finds his eyes on her.*]

If I thought you really cared for him, I would have him stabbed tonight, before he reached his palazzo.

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA: You told me that I was to marry him.

CESAR: Marry him, yes! But not to love him! (*He walks about, stops, and speaks calmly.*) Have you forgotten who you are? You're not some slut from the hills. You're a Borgia. We're not like other people. Oh, we take lovers—yes! Have mistresses—yes! But they mean nothing to us. This blood—(*He takes her wrist and lays his own wrist upon it.*) This blood which beats in you, and beats in me, it is not like other blood! (*He releases her and walks away again.*) Our brother Goffredo is nothing. Giovanni is less than nothing—because he's dead! (*He laughs suddenly and then is grave again.*) But you and I, Lucretia—they accuse us of incest—the rhymers in the streets, and that rascal Sforza. But we are more intimately and irrevocably bound together than if we had lain together every night. Because we are—what we are—we can trust no one, and no one trusts us. If we shared the world between us, and you lived on one side of it, and I on the other, we should still know and trust only each other. (*He stops and smiles at her charmingly.*) When I own the world, Lucretia, you shall hold half of it in trust for me. You're the only one in the world whom I could trust to do so. (*He comes to her and takes her hands again, very gently, looking down at them.*) Do you think that a husband could come between us? Do you think a marriage could divorce you from me? (*He rests both her hands lightly in one of his, and holds out the other.*) Give me the ring.

[*Lucretia looks up at him in protest. He smiles and still holds out his hand. She slowly puts in it the hand with the ring on it. Cesar draws the ring off, still smiling, and kisses her hand. He turns away, and she stands where she is, holding the hand, as though to pretend that the ring is still there. Burchard opens the door and Alfonso comes in, carrying a sheet of paper. Burchard remains outside.*]

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

CESAR: Ah!

[Alfonso glances uneasily from Lucretia to Cesar. Cesar takes the paper. Lucretia stands with her eyes fixed upon Cesar, as he reads.]

H'm!

[He holds the paper in his hands and looks from Alfonso to Lucretia, and back again, then down at the paper in his hand, and again at Alfonso. He smiles a little sardonically, and folds the paper.]

(To Alfonso.) Do you think the King of Naples will agree to a marriage between me and his daughter?

[Alfonso hesitates. Lucretia takes a quick, anxious breath. Alfonso glances at her, and lowers his eyes.]

ALFONSO *(bowing)*: I hope so, My Lord, indeed.

CESAR *(still smiling)*: So do I. *(He glances again from Alfonso to Lucretia.)* Well, shall we go to dinner?

[He indicates that Alfonso should take Lucretia, spreading his hands out with a faintly exaggerated slight bow. Alfonso holds out his arm to Lucretia, and she puts her hand on it. Alfonso puts his other hand on hers, and feels the ring missing, and looks at her quickly. She quickly puts her other hand on his, smiling up at him. He responds to her at once, and they go out together, smiling at each other like lovers. Cesar stands for a moment watching them go. Then he tosses the letter on the floor and follows them, with his springy, slightly swaggering walk, like a young bull looking for trouble.]

Curtain

Scene 2

Lucretia's apartment in the Vatican, some months later.

It is an idle, luxurious, lady's room, with an ornate day-bed. There is a window in an embrasure, and a window-seat, on which Lucretia sits, looking out, with her arms folded on the window-ledge. It is evening and high summer. Pietro sits perched on a stool, singing a love song.

PIETRO (*singing*): My love is a lady with golden hair.
There's no sunlight without her.
Her eyes have a starlight beyond compare,
Perfume lingers about her.
Like snow is her breast, only whiter far.
Like flowers do her sweet lips dis sever.
My love is a lady with golden hair,
And I love her forever,
And I love her forever.

[At first Lucretia hums the melody with him, smiling a little. But then she turns her head away, and he finishes alone. When he ends, there is a short silence.]

If I were Michaelangelo, I should paint you now as
Dido, gazing out over the lonely headland in the
hope of seeing Aeneas' ship returning.

[Lucretia turns to look at him quickly.]

LUCRETIA: But Aeneas never did return!

[Pietro smiles, and makes no reply. Lucretia turns back to the window and sighs.]

It's so hot! Think of Cesar campaigning in this heat.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

PIETRO: Heat is congenial to him. Whoever heard of lightning striking in a snowstorm? Besides, to the victorious soldier, the weather is always fine. If he'd been defeated, now——

LUCRETIA (*getting up*): Cesar will never be defeated! Never! He isn't like other men. If I thought that Cesar could be defeated, I should believe that God could be! (*She moves languidly across the room, sits down on the day-bed, reclines on her elbow, and sighs.*) If only it were not so hot!

PIETRO (*with malicious intent*): It was like this, the day you were married.

LUCRETIA: Oh, don't! Don't remind me of that day! How happy I was. (*She puts her face down on her arms.*) Alfonso, Alfonso! How could you go away and leave me!

PIETRO: How? By horseback. But—why? What makes a young husband leave his year-old wife to cry in the cradle of their marriage, while he goes gadding off to Naples? H'm! Fear, perhaps—that sharp spur to flying hooves.

LUCRETIA (*suddenly sitting up and speaking sharply and defensively*): No one wants to be killed!

PIETRO: No. Fear of death is usually the last to see a man alive.

LUCRETIA (*reclining again*): If he thought he was in danger—— (*Her voice slides away.*)

PIETRO (*after a moment*): It's a strange thing. A man sees a viper in the path. He turns and runs away from it. Well, you may say, he was wise to do so. The snake is deadly. Yet another man may see the viper there and step straight by it, his courage sucking the venom from the snake, even before it can sting him. But when that—cautious man returns—as at last he must—the viper will remember his hurrying footsteps and this time it will strike more quickly! Was he so wise, after all, to run away?

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA (*who has been only half-listening*): Viper? What is your viper?

PIETRO: Death. That slim, cold, ancient viper, death.

LUCRETIA (*impatiently*): Oh, death! Why must you always talk of death! (*She gets up and whirls impatiently about.*) It is life, life, life that I love! It is death to be alone here! (*She sinks down on the window-seat again.*) If only Carlotta of Aragon would have married Cesar! At least Naples would have mattered to him then! But since he married Charlotte of Navarre, Naples is nothing to him! He's no need of Naples, when Navarre is his friend.

PIETRO: Since his latest victories, he's no need of anyone! He stands on the fortress of Forli like a lion over his kill, and all the jackals come running towards him.

LUCRETIA (*with shining eyes*): Yes! All Italy is his now!

PIETRO (*deliberately*): Not quite all, I think. Ferrara still holds off.

[*Lucretia looks at him quickly.*]

And Alfonso d'Este is now a widower, as I hear.

[*Lucretia gets up angrily. She walks about and then stops, with a change of expression, and looks at him.*]

LUCRETIA: How can you be so cruel? How can you torment me so? Sometimes I think you are possessed of the devil!

PIETRO: No. I may serve the devil, but I am not yet possessed by him.

LUCRETIA: Then, why, why? Why must you always pick and stab, like a cruel child? You know how unhappy I am! Why must you make it worse?

PIETRO: Madonna, I don't mean to hurt you! (*He catches himself up.*) O, God help me, sometimes I do!

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

LUCRETIA (*wildly*): Do I use you so? Do I taunt you with things you are ashamed of, and make you think of things you are afraid of, and remind you of things you would rather forget? Do I?

PIETRO (*contritely*): No, Madonna. I'm sure that in all your life you have never done anything unkind.

LUCRETIA: Then be kind to me, Pietro! You know how much I need kindness now! If he doesn't come back, I think I shall die! And if he does come back, I'm afraid they will kill him. (*She sinks down on the bed, sobbing.*) No matter what happens, I must be miserable for the rest of my life!

[*Pietro comes to kneel beside her. He takes her hand and kisses it.*]

PIETRO: Madonna, ah, Madonna! (*After a moment, he speaks in a changed tone.*) Madonna, have you thought that you might—leave Rome, yourself?

LUCRETIA (*raising her head, to look at him*): Oh no! Cesar would never let me go.

PIETRO: You could leave secretly, in disguise. It could be arranged.

LUCRETIA: No, no! He would find me, wherever I was! He would drag me out from behind the throne of God! There is no hope for me. I am lost in a wilderness of misery, and there is no way out!

[*She puts her head down again and cries, while Pietro looks at her helplessly. Sancia comes in, pauses, and goes quickly to Lucretia.*]

SANCIA: Lucretia! Dearest Lucretia! What is it? I suppose it is Pietro who has been tormenting you with his wicked tongue!

[*Pietro looks up quickly to deny it, and then can't. He gets*

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

up from his knees and turns away. Sancia sits down on the bed and puts her arms round Lucretia.]

LUCRETIA (*sitting up*): No. No. It's not—Pietro has been—very kind. But—— (*Bursting into tears again.*) —the days are so long and lonely!

SANCIA (*giggling*): And the nights too, I daresay. But I've brought you some news.

LUCRETIA (*wearily*): News?

SANCIA: Can't you guess what it is?

[Lucretia shakes her head.]

LUCRETIA: Cesar?

SANCIA: No, not Cesar. Someone else.

LUCRETIA: A letter!

SANCIA (*smiling*): No. Something better than that.

LUCRETIA: What is it? Sancia, tell me!

SANCIA: He's coming back.

LUCRETIA: Alfonso?

SANCIA (*laughing*): I hope you weren't expecting someone else! He's in the City now.

LUCRETIA: Here? In Rome?

SANCIA (*smiling*): Here, in Rome. He sent a message, asking me to tell you. He's at his palazzo now, and he'll be here to see you this very evening.

[Lucretia slowly puts her aside and stands up, with a look on her face at once wondering and troubled.]

LUCRETIA: Alfonso. Alfonso here. (*Confusedly.*) No. No.

SANCIA: Why, what's the matter? I thought you would be so pleased. You wrote and begged him to come.

LUCRETIA (*violently*): Yes, yes! Because I wanted him. (*She turns away and speaks quietly.*) And my father told

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

me to write to him. But I never thought— At least—
Don't say *I* brought him back!

SANCIA: Why, dearest Lucretia, what nonsense is this! You said you wanted him——

LUCRETIA: Of course I want him! I am sick with wanting him! But— (*She walks up and down.*) He must leave Rome at once.

SANCIA (*laughing*): Leave Rome? Why, he has only just arrived!

LUCRETIA (*breaking in*): At once! Before Cesar gets back.

SANCIA (*laughing*): Why? Oh, Cesar *was* angry with him, certainly! Though it was most ungrateful of him, when Alfonso perjured himself in ten different letters, trying to persuade Carlotta to marry him! But all that is forgotten now.

LUCRETIA (*slowly*): You think Cesar would forget? I have heard him say that to forgive an enemy, in the hope of heaven, is to arrive there sooner than you expect. If a bee flew in his face when he was out hunting, and he saw it crawling on the path two years later, he would put his foot on it. He remembers the expression on a face ten years afterwards, and still resents it. No, Cesar won't have forgotten.

SANCIA: But Alfonso isn't his enemy!

LUCRETIA: One need not intend it, to become Cesar's enemy.

SANCIA: Ah, but, Lucretia! Do you think that Cesar would really do Alfonso any harm?

LUCRETIA (*forced at last into the deadly and forbidden subject*): Have you forgotten my brother—Giovanni?

SANCIA: There are always wicked rumours about Cesar. If a man's death happens to suit him, they say that he——

PIETRO (*in a sardonic bark*): Hah!

SANCIA: Hold your tongue, Pietro! Besides— (*She*

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

comes, laughing, and puts her hand round Lucretia's waist.)
—Cesar is in Forli, and Alfonso is in Rome!

[Lucretia's spirits rise, with the alarming buoyancy of the Borgias.]

LUCRETIA: Yes. *(She smiles.)* Yes! *Alfonso!*

SANCIA *(laughing)*: Shall we bring him to your chamber with music and flowers?

LUCRETIA: A second wedding!

SANCIA: I'll pronounce the benediction, and Pietro can stand on a chair and hold the naked sword over you.

LUCRETIA *(quickly)*: No, Pietro must write us a song of marriage!

PIETRO *(harshly)*: Do not ask me to write other men's love poems!

SANCIA *(maliciously)*: But that is all you are good for, Pietro, to write love poems for other men.

LUCRETIA: Now, you shan't tease each other today. Everyone must be gay. It's my wedding-day. *(Whirling about the room.)* Oh, I am so happy! Alfonso! Come, come, come! *(She lifts her head.)* Hark! Did you hear something?

SANCIA: No. What?

LUCRETIA: It sounded like people fighting.

[Pietro goes to the window.]

PIETRO: I thought I heard some shouts. *(He looks out.)* Nothing here. It's getting dark.

SANCIA: Oh, a brawl in the streets, I suppose.

LUCRETIA: Why don't I wear my wedding dress?

SANCIA: Why not?

LUCRETIA: We must hurry though. How soon will he be here?

SANCIA *(smiling)*: I don't know. But soon, I think.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

He hasn't come to Rome—but to six feet of Rome!

LUCRETIA (*startled*): What?

SANCIA (*laughing at her*): Your bed!

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Oh. (*She sighs with pleasure.*)

How shall I dress my hair? Shall I wear that gold head-dress—the one Cesar gave me?

SANCIA: Or the pearl and ruby?

LUCRETIA: No, no, that's too ornate.

SANCIA (*sighing*): I love that one.

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): I'll give it to you, as a wedding-present from the bride! Ah, that's it. I'll wear my hair like a bride—about my shoulders and with flowers in it. If only I'd known he was coming, I would have washed it. Does it look very dull?

SANCIA: No, it looks lovely. Besides, I have some oil you can brush into it. (*Going towards the door.*) Quickly, now, or you won't be ready for him.

LUCRETIA (*following her*): Pietro, find some flowers for my hair. (*She stops and looks back.*)

[*Pietro stands silent and motionless. Lucretia returns to him and takes his hand.*]

Pietro. Be happy with me.

PIETRO: Don't ask me that, Madonna. But when you are in grief, send for me again, and I will drown your sorrow in the deep waters of my unrequited love. Ah, Madonna! (*He kisses her hand.*)

LUCRETIA: My poor Pietro!

PIETRO (*smiling*): Don't pity me, Madonna. I dwell in my love like a hermit in the desert—so poor that no one will ever want to rob me of it. I am destitute, but safe.

[*Lucretia looks at him for a moment, and then turns away, laughing.*]

LUCRETIA: I would rather be happy than safe!

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

[*Sancia laughs and holds out her hand. Lucretia runs to her and takes it. They turn towards the door, and then both stop.*]

What's that?

[*There is a muffled thumping off.*]

SANCIA: The guards downstairs, presenting arms.

LUCRETIA: Oh, and look at me! He has come too soon! (*She laughs.*) I never thought I would say *that*! Quickly, Sancia, tidy my hair. Oh, there is a mark on my dress!

[*Sancia bustles about her. Lucretia suddenly clutches her and they stand still, listening. Stumbling, heavy footsteps approach along the corridor. There is a jerky mutter of men's voices.*]

SANCIA (*crossing herself*): Mother of God, what is it?

LUCRETIA: Pietro! What is it?

[*Pietro goes and opens the door, and turns back.*]

PIETRO: Madonna!

[*Two members of the Papal Guard come in, carrying Alfonso. He is unconscious, and covered in blood.*]

LUCRETIA: Alfonso! O God, he has killed him!
(*She faints.*)

PIETRO: Madonna!

[*He kneels beside her. The two soldiers lay Alfonso on the bed. Sancia stands motionless.*]

GIACOMO: The Duke of Biselli asked to be brought here.

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

LUIGI: Before he fainted.

GIACOMO: "The Madonna Lucretia," he said, "take me to her. No one else." I hope we did right.

LUIGI: That's what he said.

[*They shuffle uneasily.*]

We sent a message to His Holiness as well.

[*They look at each other. Sancia stands quite still, staring in horror at Alfonso. Lucretia begins to stir, Pietro holding her in his arms.*]

GIACOMO: We heard a noise and opened the gates, and we found him there—and the others dragging him away. They ran off when we opened the gates.

SANCIA (*dully*): Who—was it?

[*Giacomo and Luigi look at each other.*]

GIACOMO: We couldn't see who they were.

PIETRO: Madonna.

LUCRETIA: Alfonso.

LUIGI: Lord! How he bleeds!

LUCRETIA (*struggling up*): Bleeding? Then he's alive!

SANCIA: Yes. Alive. He— (*To Giacomo.*) Fetch a doctor!

LUCRETIA: No! (*With Pietro's assistance she stands up.*) Not a doctor! There is no one we can trust! (*She goes to the bed, trying to compose herself.*) We need linen and water. Sancia. Tell no one. Bring it here. (*Exit Sancia. To the Guards.*) Will you stand at the door? Allow no one to enter, except Donna Sancia. You understand me? No one!

GIACOMO (*bowing*): Madonna!

LUIGI: You can trust us, your Grace.

LUCRETIA (*with a regally charming smile*): Indeed I do trust you! What are your names?

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

GIACOMO (*uncertainly*): Giacomo Torrelli, Madonna.

LUIGI: Luigi Sperulo, Madonna.

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): Giacomo and Luigi. I won't forget. Do this for me, and I will remember you.

[*They bow, and look at her and at each other, and go to the door. Pietro comes to stand beside the bed.*]

LUCRETIA: Dear God, he will bleed to death. In that chest, Pietro, there are some dresses and scarves. Bring them quickly.

[*She takes off her kerchief and ties it round Alfonso's arm. Pietro goes to the chest and brings a bundle of rich clothes to her. Together they bend over Alfonso. He stirs and groans.*]

Alfonso! Dear heart! Lie still.

ALFONSO: Lucretia. Save me! Lucretia! I can't move!

LUCRETIA: You are safe. Don't be afraid. I will take care of you.

ALFONSO: I saw the face of one of them. I knew him. He serves Cesar. (*Suddenly seeing Pietro.*) Who is that?

LUCRETIA: It's all right. Lie still. It is Pietro.

ALFONSO: No! No! Send him away. He's Cesar's man!

LUCRETIA (*to Pietro*): You must go.

PIETRO: But, Madonna——

LUCRETIA (*fiercely*): Go away!

[*Pietro goes out. Lucretia works over Alfonso, now once more unconscious. Voices are heard at the door.*]

GIACOMO: But my Lord——!

LUIGI: But the Donna Lucretia——

[*Cesar comes in. Lucretia turns to glance over her shoulder. She starts up and stands defensively in front of Alfonso.*]

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO

LUCRETIA: No! Cesar, no! I thought you were in Forli.

CESAR (*smiling*): I decided to come and find out what was happening in my absence. (*He glances at the bed.*) Interesting events, I see. Is he alive?

LUCRETIA (*defiantly*): Yes!

CESAR: H'm.

[*Lucretia stands looking at him, breathing quickly. In her shock and excitement, Cesar's habitual ascendancy is lost.*]

[*He moves towards the bed. Lucretia clenches her fists.*]

LUCRETIA: You shan't touch him!

CESAR: Touch him? Certainly not. He is covered with blood. You have some on your dress. You'd better go and change.

LUCRETIA: I am not going to leave him!

[*Cesar approaches, puts his hands on her shoulders and puts her aside. He leans over Alfonso, while Lucretia stands by in an anguish of apprehension. Cesar straightens and moves away.*]

CESAR: I don't think we need to worry. It looks as though he's going to die.

LUCRETIA (*turning back to Alfonso, in a burst of feeling*): He shan't! I won't let him! Where's Sancia? Why doesn't she bring the bandages? (*She bends over Alfonso again.*)

CESAR: As a nurse, you are altogether too zealous.

LUCRETIA: You didn't say so when I nursed our father—saved his life, perhaps.

CESAR: *His* life was necessary.

[*Lucretia holds Alfonso and gazes up at Cesar.*]

You mistake the meaning of "necessary". Necessary is what is necessary to *me*. If our father were to

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

die now, it would be extremely inconvenient. I need at least ten years to get such a grip of Italy that his death will make no difference. You did well to save the Pope's life. But *this!* (*Contemptuously.*) What use is *this* to me?

[*Lucretia still looks at him, holding Alfonso and half-crying. Sancia comes to the door, carrying white linen and a bowl of water. She stops short at the sight of Cesar, and then, like a man crossing open country through a hail of bullets, bravely walks across the room to Lucretia's side. Alfonso stirs and groans.*]

ALFONSO: Lucretia.

LUCRETIA: I am here.

ALFONSO: Don't leave me.

LUCRETIA: Never, I promise you. I will never leave you for an instant!

[*Cesar stands quite still, smiling very slightly, while Lucretia, still on her knees, holding Alfonso, looks at him defiantly.*]

Curtain

ACT TWO

The same. A few weeks later. Evening.

It is very hot. The room is in darkness, because heavy shutters are closed over the window, but a chink of light all round them shows that outside it is sunlight. Several candles are burning in the room, and one by the bed shows palely the face of Alfonso asleep, his left shoulder still bandaged. There is a little cooking-stove, with a pan of broth heating on it. The whole room has altogether lost its air of luxury, and looks to be in a state of siege. Wine and glasses stand on a table beside the bed.

Lucretia and Sancia sit talking together in the dull exhaustion of sick-bed watchers.

SANCIA: If only it were not so hot! Can't we open the shutters for a little while?

LUCRETIA: No, it would upset Alfonso. He is so afraid of the balcony!

[She gets up and goes and stands by the bed, looking down at Alfonso. She smiles.]

He is still asleep.

[She returns to stand by Sancia, smiling.]

He is better. A little stronger each day. Before very long we shall be able to move him.

[Sancia looks up at her quickly. Lucretia turns away, as though to escape something. There is a curious little silence before Sancia speaks.]

SANCIA: If we can get him out of here.

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA (*moving impatiently about*): We must! Somehow we must! (*She sits down on the window-seat, in the shadow.*)

SANCIA: Perhaps we could lower him out of the window.

[*Lucretia sighs.*]

LUCRETIA (*wearily*): There is no one we could trust to do it.

[*There is a silence. Lucretia moves quickly and apprehensively, looking towards the door.*]

LUCRETIA: Did you hear something?

SANCIA: Giacomo shuffling his feet. I don't know which is worse—Giacomo shuffling his feet, or Luigi clearing his throat. I suppose we could put Giacomo in felt slippers, but what we can do about Luigi I don't know, except strangle him.

LUCRETIA: Oh, don't! I love to hear them both!

SANCIA: Yes, at least the door is safe.

LUCRETIA (*in a low voice*): Not safe. But guarded.

SANCIA (*obstinately*): They are members of the Papal Guard, and everyone knows that His Holiness sent orders that they were to guard the door of this room. No one would dare to—No, not even Cesar!

[*Cesar speaks suddenly from the doorway.*]

CESAR: What would Cesar not dare to do?

[*Lucretia and Sancia stand up, Sancia with a little scream.*]

CESAR (*with an admirable bedside manner*): And how is our patient this evening?

[*He advances into the room. He is dressed in black and gold. Lucretia moves quickly to place herself by the bed.*]

ACT TWO

CESAR: Is he asleep, or dead?

LUCRETIA: He is asleep!

CESAR (*glancing at her and smiling*): Ah. (*He walks away, and prowls distastefully round the room, watched apprehensively by Lucretia.*) Why do you pen yourselves up here like prisoners, when there is no need?

SANCIA: That is what I said. I told Lucretia that there was no need, but she wouldn't believe me.

CESAR (*stopping still*): Ah? (*He speaks to Sancia, but looking at Lucretia.*) What was the ground of her disbelief?

SANCIA (*defiantly*): She said you wanted Alfonso dead!

CESAR (*pleasantly*): Certainly I want him dead. (*He looks at Lucretia.*) But His Holiness will not have it. He says it would make you unhappy. (*He strolls towards Sancia.*) How is my pretty sister-in-law?

SANCIA (*gazing up at him*): Well. But so bored!

CESAR: My poor Donna Sancia. A prison is no place for a butterfly!

[*He leans forward and kisses her.*]

SANCIA: Cesar!

[*Cesar turns back to Lucretia, who hasn't moved.*]

CESAR: You don't ask me how my wars go.

LUCRETIA: Your wars always go well.

CESAR: They are going well now! (*He walks up and down.*) The Romagna is mine. I am master of Imola, Forlì, Rimini, Faenza, Piombino—all mine! I am Duke of Romagna. As long as I live, it will belong to me. But that's nothing! Naples is the next, and after that, Urbino, Camerino, Sinigaglia, and then—Florence! (*He stops, and looks at Lucretia.*) But the man who would conquer the world must guard his

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

own doorstep. Before I go forward, I must know that Ferrara is safe behind me.

LUCRETIA (*in a whisper*): Ferrara!

CESAR: Ferrara. The Estes' friendship is nothing, without a guarantee. Although the old man is tight-fisted, he can't be bought. The young one is slow, but he can't be intimidated. Ferrara can neither be purchased, nor conquered by force of arms. But if you could have married Don Alfonso d'Este——

LUCRETIA (*taking a step back*): No!

CESAR (*turning away*): So, on one side are my plans, the triumph of our House, and the establishment of all Italy under a strong government. And on the other is this one trifling life, and a woman's happiness, which, as I told His Holiness, is as light and transitory a thing as a summer breeze.

LUCRETIA (*pleading*): Cesar.

CESAR (*looking at her*): But it seems that it is my plans which must go. (*He walks about, and looks at the stove, and stirs the broth, while Lucretia watches him, motionless. He speaks carelessly.*) I have just come from His Holiness. He is anxious to arrange for you to go to Naples.

LUCRETIA (*delighted*): Oh!

CESAR (*looking at her*): You would be glad to leave me?

LUCRETIA (*faltering*): Not to leave you—but to be with my husband!

[*Cesar comes close to her.*]

CESAR: You know I want you to be happy.

LUCRETIA: Yes, Cesar, ah, yes!

CESAR (*taking her by the elbows, and gazing down at her*): In future you must want what I want—then you will be happy.

LUCRETIA: I only want Alfonso! Let me keep him!

ACT TWO

[Cesar releases her, and steps carelessly away.]

CESAR: I have no choice. His Holiness will have it so. Well, Donna Sancia. You must take the air soon, or you will lose all the bloom from those pretty cheeks.

[He puts his hand under her chin. She expects him to kiss her, but instead he releases her and turns back to Lucretia.]

CESAR: Shall I leave the Papal Guard still on the door?
LUCRETIA (*quickly*): Yes! Yes, please.

CESAR (*smiling*): As you will. Give my regards to Don Alfonso when he wakes. Tell him that I shall see him again, before he leaves for Naples. (*He bows to Sancia.*) Donna Sancia.

[Sancia curtsseys. Cesar smiles at her slowly and then glances at Lucretia. She runs to him and kneels to kiss his hand.]

LUCRETIA: Ah, Cesar, I am sorry to disappoint you!

[He raises her.]

CESAR (*very gently*): You will never disappoint me, Lucretia.

[He kisses her on the forehead, and goes out.]

SANCIA (*gaily*): You see? We are safe!

LUCRETIA (*looking after Cesar*): Yes. I suppose so.

SANCIA: Of course! (*She sighs.*) How glad I shall be to get out of this room. Cesar was right. We need some fresh air. (*Suddenly.*) Lucretia, let me go out, just for a little while! I will walk in the garden for a few minutes. I'll be back before nightfall, I promise you!

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA: No, Sancia no!

SANCIA: But there is no danger now!

LUCRETIA: Don't go! Please don't!

SANCIA: I really think I shall be ill if I stay in here any longer! Especially when there is no need for it. You heard what Cesar said. There is nothing to be afraid of now. Alfonso is safe. (*She smooths her dress.*) I'll change my clothes, and I'll bring some of our dresses in here, shall I? (*She goes to kiss Lucretia.*) That's what is wrong with us! Wearing the same clothes day after day is enough to drive a saint into distraction!

[*She laughs, smooths her dress again, and goes towards the door.*]

SANCIA: Giacomo! Open up!

GIACOMO (*from outside*): Madonna?

[*Sancia turns to look at her.*]

LUCRETIA (*going to the door*): Giacomo!

[*Giacomo opens the door and peers round it.*]

LUCRETIA: Donna Sancia is going to take the air in the garden. Admit her when she returns, but no one else.

GIACOMO: Of course, Madonna.

SANCIA (*her hands to her hair*): Oh dear! I'm sure I look terrible. It's so dark in here, I couldn't see properly. Oh! It seems as though we have been in here for years, instead of weeks. (*She goes out, Giacomo standing aside, and then she returns to the doorway.*) Lucretia! (*She laughs, uneasily.*) I expect I shall be back tonight, but if I am not—don't worry if I am late!

ACT TWO

LUCRETIA (*in a last appeal*): Sancia!

SANCIA (*quickly*): I'll be back first thing tomorrow morning!

[*She goes out quickly. Giacomo glances at Lucretia, and then goes out and shuts the door. Lucretia remains staring at it for a few moments. As Giacomo, taking up guard again, stamps his feet, Alfonso starts up.*]

ALFONSO: What was that? What was——?

LUCRETIA (*turning to him quickly*): It's all right, my love!

ALFONSO: The door! I heard the door shut! Who——?

LUCRETIA: Sancia has gone out for—for a little while.

ALFONSO: Why? Where has she gone?

LUCRETIA: Only to take the air. (*She goes to him.*) I'm glad she has gone. Now you and I can have a little time together. (*She helps him to sit up.*) Are you thirsty? Oh, wait, I must comb your hair! (*She fetches a comb, and she kisses him.*) Ah, love, you look so much better!

ALFONSO: Yes, I feel stronger.

LUCRETIA: Soon you will be quite well again! Oh, the wine! You'll have some wine?

ALFONSO: A little.

[*Lucretia pours out a glass, tastes it herself, looking at him, so that he can see that she is doing so, and then kneels beside the bed to give the glass to him. Alfonso drinks. He smiles at her and takes her hand.*]

I'm hungry.

LUCRETIA (*laughing lovingly*): You shall have some broth. It's all ready.

[*She gets up and goes to kneel beside the stove, stirring the broth. Alfonso, holding the glass between his hands, watches her.*]

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

Sancia and I were saying just now, you will soon be able to travel. Won't you be happy to see Naples again?

ALFONSO: I shall never leave here alive.

LUCRETIA: How can you say such a wicked thing! Of course you will! (*She pauses and looks at him.*) You must have courage, Alfonso!

ALFONSO: How can I, lying here helpless?

[*Lucretia pours some broth into a bowl, gets up and brings it to him. She tastes it, and then puts a spoonful into his mouth, and gives him bowl and spoon.*]

LUCRETIA: You must drink this and get strong—and then you won't be helpless at all! You see, I must treat you like a child, when you are so naughty!

ALFONSO: I am as weak as a child.

LUCRETIA: Hush! (*She gives him the bowl and a spoon, and sits beside him.*) You won't say children are weak, when you see our son! He is the finest child you ever saw!

ALFONSO (*smiling*): I wish I could see him.

LUCRETIA: We'll take him and his nurse to Naples with us. He is such a beautiful boy.

ALFONSO: Of course. He is your son!

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Now I know you're better! That's the first compliment you have paid me since you were—since you became ill! Alfonso, it won't be for ever, this darkness and fear! If you had known this Borgia world all your life, as I have, you would know that there is only one way to live in it, and that is to look forward all the time! Now and then, you find yourself enclosed in a prison of misery, but then you must behave in it as other prisoners do—with patience and courage, and being careful not to make your gaoler angry so that he dashes out your brains! And then at last the gaoler will become indifferent,

ACT TWO

and you will be set free. Ah, that's it! You wait for the moment of release, and at last it comes!

ALFONSO: But it is so unjust——!

LUCRETIA: No, no! One mustn't reason or question or rebel, but enjoy the sunshine when it comes, and never look back into the darkness!

ALFONSO: Will you and I, Lucretia, ever come into the sunshine again?

LUCRETIA: We will, we will! Dearest heart, we will! *(She takes the bowl and puts it down, and takes both his hands.)* It is only to have patience! One fine summer day, we'll ride out of Rome, and never return! How wonderful it will be to be travelling with my husband!

ALFONSO *(laughing)*: Dearest Lucretia!

LUCRETIA *(kneeling by the bed)*: We will ride through the streets of Naples, in the sunshine, and I will carry—no, *you* shall carry Rodrigo, and he shall be dressed in a robe of finest white satin, embroidered all over with flowers made of pearls. The girls on the roof-tops will throw roses down upon us, and we will go into our palazzo like a bride and groom, with singing and dancing, music and flowers, and we will live there, happy and safe, for the rest of our lives!

[They hold each other for a few moments in silence, and Lucretia lays her head against him. There is a stamp and a challenge outside the door.]

GIACOMO *(off)*: Halt! No admittance!

LUCRETIA *(starting up)*: Who's that!

ALFONSO: Cesar!

LUCRETIA: No! No!

[She stands before the bed. Alfonso struggles to get off the bed. There is an altercation, off.]

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

GIACOMO (*off*): Wait here, Captain!

[*Lucretia turns back to Alfonso, and puts her arms round him.*]

LUCRETIA: No, no, lie down! It is all right. I am here!

[*Giacomo comes in.*]

GIACOMO: Madonna, there is a Captain of the Papal Guard——

LUCRETIA: No! Admit no one!

GIACOMO: He comes from His Holiness.

[*Lucretia leaves Alfonso and comes forward.*]

LUCRETIA: How do you know?

GIACOMO: Madonna, it is Michellotto Corella.

LUCRETIA: You know him!

GIACOMO: Yes, Madonna. It is Captain Corella.

ALFONSO: Don't let him in!

LUCRETIA (*after a moment's hesitation*): I will come outside.

ALFONSO: No! Don't leave me!

[*Lucretia stands in alarmed indecision, looking from him to the door.*]

GIACOMO: He says he has a message for you from His Holiness, Madonna.

LUCRETIA: Ask him to come in, Giacomo. And you stand close in case I call you.

GIACOMO: Yes, Madonna.

[*He goes out. Lucretia returns to Alfonso.*]

LUCRETIA: We must get away from here, love.

ACT TWO

ALFONSO: But are you sure——

LUCRETIA: We are sure of nothing. But only my father can help us. If this man comes from him——

[Michellotto Corella comes in while they are speaking, and pauses inside the room. He has a calm, gentle and smiling face. He bows to Lucretia who comes towards him.]

MICHELLOTTO: Madonna!

LUCRETIA: You are Captain Corella?

MICHELLOTTO: At your service, Madonna.

LUCRETIA: You have a message for me from His Holiness?

MICHELLOTTO: Yes, Madonna. His Holiness wishes to speak to you.

[Lucretia looks at him distrustfully. Michellotto, with a faint look of surprise, speaks again after a moment.]

MICHELLOTTO (*bowing*): His Holiness has sent me to escort you to his presence.

LUCRETIA (*with a quick look of horror*): But His Holiness knows I can't leave here!

MICHELLOTTO: Madonna?

LUCRETIA: I cannot leave the Duke of Biselli!

[Michellotto's puzzlement gives way to a look of gentle, almost tender concern.]

MICHELLOTTO: Oh, I am very sorry, Madonna, indeed! I—he—it was understood that His Excellency's condition was much improved, and that he was out of danger. I——

LUCRETIA: The danger is that he might be attacked again!

[Michellotto looks absolutely astonished. He speaks with gentlemanly impetuosity.]

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

MICHELLOTTO: *Attacked*, Madonna! Here, in the Vatican?

[*Lucretia is shaken by the ingenuousness of his face and manner. She opens her mouth, glances at Alfonso, and can find no reply.*]

MICHELLOTTO: Oh, I beg your pardon, Madonna! That was presumptuous of me! (*He retreats towards the door.*) Then I will tell His Holiness that you——
LUCRETIA (*taking a step towards him*): No, wait!

[*Michellotto pauses, and smiles charmingly.*]

LUCRETIA: Do you know why His Holiness wants to see me?

MICHELLOTTO (*smiling*): Well, Madonna, officially, of course, I know nothing, but—— (*He pauses.*)

[*Lucretia takes a step nearer. Michellotto, gazing at her with the protective admiration to which she is accustomed, becomes delicately confidential.*]

Madonna, I have been ordered to command an escort of troops, to take the Donna Vanozza Cattanei to Naples——

LUCRETIA (*clapping her hands*): Of course! (*She turns back to Alfonso.*) Of course, that is the way! We are to travel with my mother! (*Her spirits are instantly sky high. She takes Alfonso's hand, laughing breathlessly.*) We are safe! You see, I was right! Our moment of release is near! I must see His Holiness at once.

ALFONSO: No! Lucretia——

[*She glances quickly at Michellotto, and drops her voice.*]

LUCRETIA: My love, this is our chance, and we must take it!

ACT TWO

ALFONSO: It is a trap!

LUCRETIA: No, of course not!

[*Her mind misgives her. She looks uneasily at Michellotto.*]

ALFONSO: That man is Cesar's. I heard his voice when I was attacked in the street.

[*Lucretia looks quickly from him to Michellotto. Michellotto takes a step forward. He speaks with gentle self-deprecation.*]

MICHELLOTTO: Madonna, when His Excellency was—injured—it was I who gave orders that he should be carried up to your apartment. It may be that His Excellency heard my voice then—before he became unconscious.

LUCRETIA (*smiling gratefully*): Yes! That must have been what it was.

[*Alfonso is silent. Michellotto speaks with the simple honesty of the plain soldier.*]

MICHELLOTTO: Forgive me, Madonna. I have been wounded myself, and have known what it is to lie in a darkened room and suffer from a sick man's fancies. His Excellency has been confined for too long. He will be better when he is on the road.

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): Yes! (*She drops on her knees and puts her arms round Alfonso.*) You sec, my love? It is so, indeed!

ALFONSO (*to himself*): I did not use to be such a coward, until I came to Rome.

LUCRETIA: Of course you are not a coward! You have been sick, but soon you will be well again! I will only be gone for a few minutes. You are not afraid of my leaving you?

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

[*There is a brief pause. Alfonso speaks calmly.*]

ALFONSO: No. One reaches the end at last of being afraid. What will be, will be.

LUCRETIA: Our happiness will be! And a lifetime of love. (*She kisses him.*)

[*Lucretia gets up and goes to the door. Michellotto opens it and stands aside, his eyes turned dutifully down.*]

LUCRETIA: Giacomo!

[*Giacomo comes to the door.*]

LUCRETIA: I am going to see His Holiness. While I am gone, you are to stay in the room with His Excellency. When does Luigi relieve you?

GIACOMO (*full of grievance*): He should be here now, Madonna. He——

[*He catches Michellotto's eye, and falls silent. Michellotto once more looks at the floor.*]

LUCRETIA: When he comes, tell him to guard the door. You stay in here until I return.

GIACOMO (*sourly*): Yes, Madonna.

LUCRETIA: I am sorry to keep you beyond your hours of duty. But, you see, I know that I can trust you.

GIACOMO (*softened, bowing*): Yes, Madonna.

[*Lucretia goes into the doorway, turns to smile at Alfonso, pauses, and suddenly returns into the room. She goes to his bedside. Michellotto looks up quickly, his face watchful.*]

LUCRETIA (*very softly*): Love, this is the first bolt being drawn back. If we lean upon the door now, perhaps the rest will yield.

ACT TWO

[She is pleading with him. Alfonso is silent for a moment, and then smiles at her.]

ALFONSO: Of course. We can't stay huddled in prison together for the rest of our lives. If this is the way of escape, let us take it, no matter where it leads.

LUCRETIA: It leads to safety.

[She rather wishes than knows it to be true. They look at each other for a moment, and then she goes to the door. Michellotto's eyes are on the ground. Alfonso starts up as she reaches the doornay.]

ALFONSO: Lucretia!

[She turns.]

ALFONSO: Don't—be gone long!

LUCRETIA (*smiling*): I won't. Only long enough to learn the road to Naples!

[She goes out, followed by Michellotto, who closes the door behind him. Alfonso sinks back and turns his head away. Giacomo looks at him, looks at the door, sighs and scratches his head.]

GIACOMO (*doubtfully*): Is there—anything I can get for you, your Excellency?

ALFONSO (*without moving*): No. I have nothing. I want nothing. I am nothing.

[Giacomo leans his sword against the end of the bed, pushes his helmet back and loosens his belt.]

GIACOMO: It's not very easy, you see, your Excellency. I'm not really sure whether I'm supposed to be a

sentry or a nurse. (*He looks at Alfonso, looks at a stool, and finally draws it up to the end of the bed and sits down on it.*) 'Course, I done some nursing in my time. I nursed Luigi once through the tertian fever. You know what the tertian fever's like? Special of Rome, they call it! I didn't want to have anything to do with it, myself, but Captain Corella—'course, he *was* in the Papal Guard then—(*he stops short, glances at Alfonso, and goes on quickly*)—anyway, Captain Corella detailed me to nurse him, so I had to do it. Saved Luigi's life, I did, but is he grateful? (*He jerks a thumb at the door.*) The clock's struck the half-hour, and where is he? (*With a laugh.*) Huh! I know where he is! Baying the moon. His moon's called Fiammetta. She lives in the Via della Speranza! I'd want something more than hope before I'd stand under a woman's balcony night after night in the season of fevers! Now, *my* woman—(*He stops and loosens his collar.*) Whew! It's hot in here, Sir. (*He gets up.*) Shan't I open the shutters?

ALFONSO (*starting up*): No! No! Are you mad? Is this a time to open the back way in when I am here alone?

GIACOMO (*wounded*): Well, Sir, I am here——

ALFONSO (*wearily amused*): Oh—I'm sorry. But—don't open the shutters.

GIACOMO (*appeased and cheerful*): Very good, Sir. (*He stands by the end of the bed, with his back to the door, very much at ease, with one foot crossed over the other.*) 'Course, women are funny. Luigi stands there under the balcony every night, saying that he's dying for love of her. Now, *my* woman, if I said I was dying of love for *her*, she'd say, "I'd think you'd have something better to do," she'd say, "than die for love of a woman." (*He laughs.*)

[*Michellotto silently opens the door and comes in and pauses.*]

ACT TWO

'Course, if it comes to that, I *should* have something better to do!

[*Alfonso sees Michellotto and struggles to sit up.*]

GIACOMO (*concerned*): Are you all right, Sir? I——

[*He follows Alfonso's gaze, and looks over his shoulder. Then he snatches up his sword, and confronts Michellotto.*]

GIACOMO: Captain!

MICHELLOTTO: You can go. I will relieve you.

[*Giacomo opens his mouth and shuts it, hesitates, then speaks stubbornly.*]

GIACOMO: I was told to stay here until the Madonna Lucretia returned.

MICHELLOTTO: I now tell you to leave.

[*Giacomo glances at Alfonso, whose eyes are fixed silently upon him.*]

GIACOMO (*troubled*): I can't leave, Captain.

MICHELLOTTO (*pleasantly*): Sooner or later, you will leave. The sooner, the better, for you.

GIACOMO (*in his thick-nitted way*): The Madonna Lucretia told me to stay here.

MICHELLOTTO (*pleasantly*): And when your neck is broken, will the Madonna Lucretia mend it? (*He takes a few steps towards him.*)

GIACOMO (*weakening*): Well—I——

[*He glances at Alfonso. Michellotto, in one swift movement, draws his sword. Giacomo swallows, clears his throat, and looks at Alfonso.*]

GIACOMO: A man can only do so much, Your

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

Excellency. The Captain is the best swordsman in Italy.

[He takes a step towards the door. Clumping footsteps approach. Giacomo stops and calls out.]

GIACOMO: Luigi! Luigi, draw your sword!

[Luigi comes in, pauses, and draws his sword, Michellotto is now standing between him and Giacomo.]

LUIGI: Captain! *(He looks at Giacomo.)* What——?

GIACOMO: The Madonna Lucretia told me to stay here. The Captain wanted me to leave.

LUIGI *(matter-of-fact)*: We can't leave. We're posted as sentries. You don't command us now, Captain.

[Michellotto looks from one to the other, and quietly sheathes his sword. Alfonso is suddenly breathing quickly.]

LUIGI *(taking a step into the room)*: We must ask you to leave, Captain.

[Michellotto looks at them calmly. They grip their swords and step towards him. Cesar appears silently in the doorway. Michellotto looks towards him. Luigi and Giacomo both dart a quick look at the door, then gasp, fall back and lower their swords. Cesar steps into the room and stands for a moment looking from Giacomo to Luigi with dangerous, lowering glances. Then he simply jerks his head towards the door. Luigi and Giacomo, without a word or glance, go out. Cesar shuts the door behind them, and turns to look at Alfonso. Alfonso lets his breath go and leans back.]

ALFONSO: Is it as simple as that, at last?

CESAR: It is very simple.

[He looks at Michellotto, who takes a step forward. Alfonso struggles up.]

ACT TWO

ALFONSO: No! No! Not yet! I—I——

CESAR: You have never been useful to me. Now you are an encumbrance.

ALFONSO: I'll go away! I'll leave Rome!

[*Cesar smiles sweetly.*]

CESAR: You will never leave Rome.

ALFONSO: Don't kill me! I'll—I will give—Lucretia a divorce!

CESAR: On what grounds? Non-consummation? The child's birth was miraculous, I suppose? Or will you say that Rodrigo is not your son?

[*Alfonso struggles between fear and pride. He speaks with difficulty.*]

ALFONSO: No! He is my son.

CESAR: There is only one divorce to be made, Michellotto!

ALFONSO: No! Not—like this! (*He struggles to get up.*) I am a Prince of Naples! Don't let me die like this—in a bed!

CESAR: You are a dead man. What does it matter how you die?

[*Michellotto glances at Cesar, who nods. Alfonso succeeds in standing up beside the bed.*]

ALFONSO (*he laughs a little*): The face of death is not so terrible, after all, as his shadow.

[*Michellotto comes close.*]

ALFONSO: Ah, Jesu!

[*Michellotto in absolute silence takes Alfonso by the throat*

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

and breaks his neck, and lays him down on the bed. Pietro comes quickly in.]

PIETRO: Madonna, they are saying——

[He stops short, seeing Cesar and Michellotto and the still figure lying across the bed.]

CESAR: Ah, Pietro. Go to the Donna Sancia—you will find her in my apartments—and tell her that she had better prepare herself to return to Naples.

[There is a short silence.]

PIETRO: I shall go limping on no more errands for you, my Lord. Even in a world which God has abandoned, I cannot forget that I am a man.

[Cesar raises his eyebrows and smiles a little.]

CESAR: You are more of a man than I thought.

[Pietro turns to go out, but pauses.]

PIETRO: I don't want to travel for the rest of my life with my head turned over my shoulders. What will you do with me?

CESAR: With you? Nothing. If you no longer wish to serve me, the loss is yours.

PIETRO: Yes. Your household will never lack servants, but it's not so easy in this world to find a man to serve. You are right. The loss is mine.

[He goes out. Cesar looks at Michellotto and gestures towards the door. Michellotto gestures after Pietro.]

CESAR: No. Let him go. He'll return, if only to write my epitaph.

ACT TWO

[Michellotto goes out, closing the door behind him. Cesar goes to the bed, composes the body, as though sleeping, and covers it. Then he goes to stand by the window, in the shadows. Lucretia is heard running along the corridor, and comes in quickly. At first, she can't see in the comparative darkness of the room.]

LUCRETIA: Alfonso! *(She pauses, glancing towards the window.)* Ah, Giacomo, are you there? *(She goes towards the bed.)* Alfonso! Wake up, my darling! We are free. We leave tomorrow. Alfonso!

[As she touches him, she knows that he is dead, screams, and drops on her knees beside the bed.]

LUCRETIA: Ah, no! No! No!

[She breaks into a wild storm of weeping. After a moment, Cesar opens the shutters with a bang. Outside, it is sunset. His black figure is silhouetted against a scarlet sky. Lucretia looks up, draws her breath in a shocked gasp, and then moans and drops her head down on the bed.]

CESAR: Leave him.

LUCRETIA: Never! I shall never leave him! I shall be buried with him.

CESAR: That would never do. Este is so conventional. He wouldn't like his wife to be buried with another man.

LUCRETIA *(in a sudden anguish of revolt)*: No, no, no, no, no! Alfonso! Alfonso!

CESAR: You have lost nothing but the pretence that you were his. Now that is over, and you are mine again.

[Lucretia slowly lifts her head and looks at him.]

LUCRETIA: Yours? Am I yours, Cesar? No! Not

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

now. (*She gets trembling to her feet.*) You are right. While he lived, he wasn't strong enough to take me away from you. His hands were too gentle. While he lived, I still belonged to you. But now he is dead, he has taken me from you for ever!

CESAR (*taking a step forward*): Lucretia!

LUCRETIA (*with slowly growing power*): I will never speak your name again. I will never think of you. If I find that you come into my thoughts, I will destroy my mind.

CESAR (*angrily*): What are you saying?

LUCRETIA: I may not command assassins, but that I have the power to do! Have you forgotten that I, too, am a Borgia? I shall cry for him all day and all night. I shall hold his picture before my eyes, until I can no longer recognise any other face—not even my own. I shall say his name over and over again, until no words have any meaning for me, but only that one, and my tongue has forgotten how to speak any other. I shall wear my mind away into one unfathomable pit of grief from which I can never be recalled. The day will come when someone will say to me, “Your brother, Cesar,” and I shall reply, “Who is that? I have never heard of him.”

CESAR: Don't, Lucretia! Don't!

[*He stumbles forward and falls on his knees, his head against her skirt.*]

LUCRETIA (*turning her head away and sobbing*): What am I to you? Nothing! Nothing!

CESAR: I am nothing without you. Lucretia!

[*He rises to one knee. She shrinks away from him.*]

CESAR: Lucretia!

LUCRETIA (*in a cry of despair*): No!

ACT TWO

[*He rises to his feet, and moves uncertainly about the room, his hand over his eyes. He turns to look at her, speaking in a trembling voice.*]

CESAR: Every man is composed of whirling fragments of dust. He must have outside himself some point of rest, if he is not to founder in the storm of his own being. For some, it is God, or Christ, or the Virgin Mary. For me, it is you. Don't take it away from me.

LUCRETIA (*beginning to tremble again*): You must find some other.

CESAR: There is none. We cling to each other above an abyss, speaking a language known only to ourselves, speechless unless we speak to each other. (*He comes closer.*) How could I even know that I existed, if you were not there to throw back the echo of myself?

LUCRETIA: I can echo nothing now but sorrow.

CESAR (*beginning to gain strength*): What? For him? He's nothing. Why should you care for him?

LUCRETIA: Because I loved him.

CESAR: What do you mean?

LUCRETIA: I mean that no matter where I was, our love stirred beneath my feet like a dancing measure. I mean that when I looked up at night, our love filled the air between me and the stars until the whole sky sang with it. I mean that from the first instant I saw him, his life was more real to me than my own. I mean, I loved him!

[*There is a long pause.*]

CESAR: I don't understand you.

LUCRETIA (*wonderingly*): No. (*She puts out a hand towards him, in a kind of pity, and then draws it back, and speaks sorrowfully*) No.

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

[*She turns away, and kneels down by the end of the bed and lays her head down.*]

CESAR: You and I, Lucretia, are like bright planets, swinging upon our predestined course, infinitely far above the petty traffic of humanity. If in our flaming passage across the dull skies, we strike upon some trivial star or meteor and send it crashing to the earth, is that a matter for tears? You might as well weep for creation, or nightfall, or wintertime. (*He walks to the window, where the sunset is giving way to the pale light of evening.*) Cities are opening their doors to me like flowers to the sun. They have been starved and broken by an infinity of petty tyrants. Now they learn what it is to be governed by one excellent tyrant, who feeds them, guards them, unites them, and preserves them from their follies. They trust me, and as long as they do trust me, they will find me—trustworthy. (*He is once more stirred with gallant anticipations. He walks up and down, as though the earth cannot hold his footsteps.*) If you will hold Ferrara for me, with its impregnable fortress, and that master of cannon, then, soon all Italy will be mine. And then it will be time to look abroad. France is not far away, and after that—— (*He stops and laughs in sudden exultation.*) How old was Alexander when he died? I will complete what he began! (*He looks at Lucretia, and comes and stands beside her.*) Leave him now. There is nothing left there.

LUCRETIA: No. You have ended my world.

CESAR (*suddenly gentle*): Have I? (*In one magnificent movement he goes on one knee beside her, holds out his hand.*) Well, then, help me to win mine!

[*Lucretia slowly puts her hand in his, and he draws her to her feet, and stands with her in his arms.*]

Curtain

ACT THREE

Scene I

The Ducal Palace at Ferrara. Three years later.

It is a bare, austere room, after the magnificence of the Vatican, though with a certain elegance of line. Beyond the room itself, is a sunny, enclosed courtyard, with vines and orange trees, so that there is a feeling of space and freedom after the painted enclosure of the Vatican.

Pietro sits reading a book. Donna Isabella comes in, a dark-haired beauty, very much aware of herself and of her position. Pietro stands up at her entrance, and bows.

ISABELLA: Where is Donna Lucretia?

PIETRO: She is washing her hair.

ISABELLA: Again?

PIETRO: The Madonna washes her hair, Donna Isabella, as a man rides his horse.

[She looks enquiring.]

For reassurance.

ISABELLA *(with a laugh)*: Oh, I think my sister-in-law has altogether too much assurance, without that!

[Ercole d'Este comes in, a neat little elderly man, like a very superior shop-keeper.]

ERCOLE: Well, well, he is nearly ready to leave. Where is Donna Lucretia?

ISABELLA: She is washing her hair, Father!

ERCOLE: *Again?* Pietro, tell Donna Lucretia that His Excellency is about to depart. I am sure she would wish to see him before he goes.

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

PIETRO (*bowing*): Very good, Don Ercole.

[*He goes out. Ercole fusses about.*]

ERCOLE: I wish she wouldn't make a prisoner of herself. It was like this when she first came here, but things were just beginning to improve, and then she lost the child. Now one would think her bedchamber was a cell, and she a nun. When she comes out of it, it is only to go to Church.

ISABELLA: A fidgetty wife, and a still-born child. I hope Alfonso is satisfied with his bargain!

ERCOLE: Ah, well, it was a forced bargain on our part. Cesar Borgia *would* have the marriage. I did my best to avoid it. I even demanded a dowry which I thought was beyond the bounds of possibility. But it was paid, it was paid! (*He clicks his teeth.*) And, I declare, I believe the Donna Lucretia has spent twice as much again since she has been here!

ISABELLA: It's outrageous! That such a marriage should be forced upon *us*! It is a gross affront to the dignity of our House!

ERCOLE: Yes, well, I won't deny that I thought as you do at first. But she is certainly a very beautiful creature——

ISABELLA (*indignantly*): Beautiful?

ERCOLE (*forgetting himself*): No, perhaps not precisely beautiful, but yet there is something about her—a grace, an animation, a feminine elegance——

ISABELLA: Father!

ERCOLE (*guiltily*): Well, we mustn't be unjust to her. Since she has been here, she has shown every desire to please——

ISABELLA (*raising her eyebrows*): Has she? (*She smiles.*) I notice that in spite of your fondness for her, you don't give her the money she asks for.

ERCOLE (*instantly*): Ah, money, no, that's different!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

Money! Why, if I gave her the annual allowance she demands, Ferrara would be ruined. No, certainly not! And I don't forget, either, that during the negotiations over the dowry, the Borgias called me a tradesman! Me! No, ten thousand ducats a year I have allowed her, and——

ISABELLA: Ten! I thought it was to be eight!

ERCOLE: Yes, well, there were messengers from the Vatican, and tears and ill-temper here—she even shut her doors against me one morning—and in the end——

ISABELLA: You gave in!

ERCOLE: Gave in? No, certainly not. She wanted twenty thousand. No, ten thousand I said, and quite enough, too.

ISABELLA: And what did Alfonso think?

ERCOLE: Huh, no one ever knows what Alfonso thinks. Besides, it had nothing whatever to do with him. It was a matter between me and my daughter-in-law. I am the Duke of Ferrara. I still have some authority, I hope.

ISABELLA: Except over the Donna Lucretia's behaviour.

ERCOLE (*throwing her a shrewd glance*): Her behaviour! I hold her purse-strings now, but no one has any authority over Donna Lucretia's behaviour except His Holiness and Lord Cesar.

ISABELLA (*standing up*): Well, I think it is——

ERCOLE: Ah, here *is* Alfonso.

[*Alfonso d'Este comes in, dressed for riding.*]

ESTE: Where is the Madonna Lucretia?

ISABELLA (*before Ercole can speak*): She is washing her hair!

[*She looks at him expectantly. He nods.*]

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

ERCOLE: I've sent Pietro to tell her that you are about to leave.

ISABELLA: It seems that *he* can always gain access to her. Is it right, do you think, Alfonso, to give him such freedom?

ESTE (*calmly*): He amuses her.

ISABELLA: More than you do, perhaps.

ESTE: Yes. Perhaps so.

ISABELLA: Don't you care?

ESTE: My feelings are my own business. I have never asked anyone else to share them.

ISABELLA: I should have thought that when her husband was about to go away for a whole year, and perhaps more, that the Donna Lucretia might at least come out of her room in time to say goodbye to him.

ESTE: She will come, when she is ready.

[*Lucretia comes in. She is sombrely, though richly, dressed, and has an air of not quite taking part in anything that is going forward, like an actor who doesn't really care about the play he is in. Este turns quickly towards her. She curtsies to Isabella and Ercole. Este goes towards her, and she gives him her hand. He leads her to a chair.*]

LUCRETIA: I'm sorry to have kept you waiting.

ESTE: It is of no consequence.

ISABELLA (*sardonically*): No, indeed!

LUCRETIA (*making polite conversation*): I hope you will have a successful journey.

[*Este bows in silence.*]

You are going to England first, and then to the Netherlands?

ESTE: And home by way of France.

ISABELLA: Oh, come, Alfonso! I'm sure the Donna

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

Lucretia knows the details of her husband's itinerary, at least!

LUCRETIA (*untroubled*): I expect my Lord will write, telling me where he is.

ESTE: Certainly— (*With a touch of eagerness.*) —if you wish it?

[*He looks at her, but she only smiles a little and says no more.*]

ERCOLE (*fussing about*): You must take care going through Navarre. They tell me the place is overrun with bands of armed men, all claiming to support this Lord or that Lord, and robbing everyone they meet to prove it. These wars, these wars! They'll be the death of us all! And so expensive, too.

LUCRETIA (*in a fleeting moment of mischief*): But perhaps if my Lord wishes to study fortifications, a few wars would be convenient for him.

ESTE: I'm not going abroad to study warfare.

LUCRETIA (*politely*): Oh? I thought you were.

ESTE: In the matter of fortifications, I think I have more to teach than to learn.

ISABELLA: Yes, certainly!

ESTE (*still addressing himself to Lucretia*): No, I am going abroad to study methods of government, the establishment of Universities, how to create a fine city with beautiful buildings, how to encourage craftsmen and merchants, poets, painters and musicians. I'm going abroad to study the arts of peace.

[*A look of animation comes into Lucretia's face. She gets up and moves away.*]

LUCRETIA: Peace, yes! Cesar's ambition is to establish all Italy in a universal peace.

ESTE (*watching her sombrely, yet faintly amused*): And when he has all Italy, will he then be satisfied?

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Oh, no! Cesar will never be satisfied. One day he will rule the world!

ESTE: I am less ambitious. Ferrara is enough for me, if I can keep it in peace.

LUCRETIA: Only that?

ISABELLA: And quite enough too, I should think!

[*Este ignores her, and continues to speak, half-mockingly, to Lucretia.*]

ESTE: Oh, well, a man must be satisfied with little in this world. His life is short. He can't make it longer. We're like children building a house of cards in an hour before bedtime. If we try to build too high, we knock it over, and our neighbour's with it. Try to settle peace on all the world, and you'll end up with your own country in ruins about you.

[*Lucretia stands looking at him, shaking her head very slightly.*]

ESTE (*looking directly at her*): When I die, I shall be forgotten. But I shall leave Ferrara behind.

ERCOLE (*fidgetting towards the courtyard*): Yes, and you must leave Ferrara behind you now, if you are to be on your way before sunset. At this rate, the time for your journey will be gone, and you due home again, and here you'll be, still talking about going!

[*Isabella moves to join him, Este moving with her.*]

ISABELLA: We will see you to your horse.

[*She looks pointedly back at Lucretia, who has sat down again. Este shepherds them out, glancing back at Lucretia.*]

ESTE: Will you go on? I will join you.

ERCOLE: Very well, very well, but don't be long.

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*Isabella goes out with an indignant backward look. As Este stands looking silently at Lucretia, Ercole's voice can be heard prattling as he goes out.*]

ERCOLE: It's a very strange thing that no one ever leaves on a journey at the time they have said. It's just like people dying. The doctors give them up, and they make their will, and you all gather round the bed, and then what do they do? They linger. I hope when my time comes, I shall go out, pouf! just like that.

[*Lucretia raises her head and sees Este.*]

LUCRETIA (*in a low voice*): I am sorry you are going away.

[*In a quick moment of hope, he takes a step towards her. She meets his gaze, and lowers her eyes.*]

I shall miss our music in the evenings.

[*Este is disappointed, and angry with himself.*]

ESTE (*ironically*): Yes. At least we shall both miss the music in the evening! (*He comes to take her hand and bows over it.*) Goodbye, Madonna.

LUCRETIA (*mildly, smiling*): Goodbye.

[*He turns away, hesitates, and then turns back.*]

ESTE: If I can—If you should ever need— (*He stops short and gives a rough laugh.*) You don't need anything from me, do you? You had a husband whom you loved, and who gave you a child. You have a father and a brother who protect you, and will always see that you come to no harm. You don't need anything from me!

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

[*As he turns away, Lucretia suddenly stands up and puts out her hand.*]

LUCRETIA: My Lord——

[*He turns back. There is an instant's pause, and it seems that they are at last to speak together with some intimacy. There is a sound of disturbance, and Michellotto Corella comes in, followed by the protesting Ercole.*]

ERCOLE: Wait! What are you doing? Are you mad?

MICHELLOTTO: I come from the Duke of Romagna!

[*Lucretia shrinks away.*]

ESTE: What do you want?

MICHELLOTTO: I must speak to the Madonna Lucretia!

LUCRETIA: No! No!

[*Este steps towards Michellotto, threateningly.*]

MICHELLOTTO: I come from the Lord Cesar, Madonna!

ESTE: You can deliver the message to me——

LUCRETIA: No! Wait!

[*Este glances at her.*]

MICHELLOTTO: I've bad news, Madonna. As bad as it can be.

LUCRETIA: What——?

MICHELLOTTO: The Pope is dead.

ERCOLE } The Pope!

ESTE } Dead!

LUCRETIA } Oh, no!

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

[*They all cross themselves. Lucretia turns away and sits down. She speaks to herself, moaning and sobbing.*]

LUCRETIA: Dead. And I not there! He loved me. He was always kind to me. Dead!

ERCOLE (*to Michellotto*): Are you mad, to break the news like this? Don't you know that Donna Lucretia has been ill? What was the Duke of Romagna about, to send a fellow like you!

LUCRETIA (*rousing herself a little*): Didn't he—is there no letter for me from the Lord Cesar?

MICHELLOTTO (*looking directly at her*): No, Madonna.

[*She gazes at him, stands up, and steps towards him.*]

LUCRETIA: What is it? My brother! The Lord Cesar! What is it?

MICHELLOTTO: He is very ill, Madonna.

LUCRETIA: *Ill? Now? At this time?*

[*She and Michellotto might be alone in the room.*]

MICHELLOTTO: *Now*, Madonna. With the Pope newly dead, and the news creeping out and all the jackals abroad to snatch what they can of the lion's kill, the Lord Cesar can scarcely lift his head from the pillow, or his hand from the covers.

LUCRETIA: Oh, God!

MICHELLOTTO: The Orsini are in arms already.

LUCRETIA: The Orsini!

MICHELLOTTO: Yes, Madonna. Urbino is lost, and Piombino.

LUCRETIA: Oh, no!

MICHELLOTTO: There's not a city but would keep faith with the Lord Cesar if it could. His presence in the Romagna would finish all revolt, but—— (*He spreads out his hands.*) —but it is like trying to hold a

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

handful of dry sand, Madonna. We who serve him are only as strong as the Lord Cesar—and he is very weak now!

LUCRETIA: I must go to him!

[*Este starts and looks at Ercole.*]

A fever, you say?

MICHELLOTTO (*bitterly*): That old scoundrel, the tertian fever, Madonna! Of course there's been talk of poison, for him and His Holiness, but no one can doubt what it is. They had supper with Cardinal Corneta and sat together in the cool of the evening, and the fever came upon them both like an assassin, struck down His Holiness, and is like to kill the Lord Cesar too!

LUCRETIA: No, it shall not! It shall not kill him!

[*They both look at each other, all enmity forgotten.*]

MICHELLOTTO: When I left, Madonna, he was almost spent.

LUCRETIA (*suddenly in tears*): Such treasure cannot be spent! (*She turns away.*) I will go to him at once.

ESTE: No!

LUCRETIA (*looking at him in astonishment*): What?

ESTE: There is no need for *you* to go.

LUCRETIA: No need? When he is ill? Whom do you think he can trust, except *me*? Don't you know that there are a thousand who wish him dead—all the petty tyrants of Italy, the Orsini, the Vitelli, the Colonnas? Whom do you suppose he dares to have in his room when he is helpless, except for—this man, and one or two others like him?—and even they becoming each day more suspect, as he grows weaker, and his Principality crumbles! Who will taste his food? And who will be trusted to give him

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

medicine? And when he is unconscious, or wandering in his mind, who is certain to guard him and to be still there beside him when he wakes? When you are ill and helpless, tell me that *you* have no need of me, and I will believe you! Until then, be silent!

ESTE (*unmoved*): Enemies are like nettles. If a man falls amongst them, he must expect to feel their sting. But if he will make such a bed, he must lie upon it—not call upon the bystanders to pull him out.

LUCRETIA: Do you dare to criticize *him*?

ESTE: I am only saying that it is not safe for you to go to Rome.

LUCRETIA: I am not going there in search of safety!

ESTE: Send your doctor to him, if you will, but such a journey at this time, and for such a cause, is not fitting for the future Duchess of Ferrara, and my wife!

LUCRETIA (*turning upon him*): Your wife? I am Lucretia di Borgia! (*She turns to Michellotto.*) Take what refreshment you need, and wait for me outside. We shall leave for Rome at once.

[*She goes out, Michellotto hastily opening the door for her. He bows, bows to Ercole and Este, and goes out. Ercole and Este look at each other.*]

ERCOLE: Will you let her go?

ESTE: How can I prevent her? I could use force, but if I did, and he recovered, my life would soon pay for it. He may be without an army, but he will never lack assassins.

ERCOLE (*working it out*): No. Let's see. Perhaps it is best that she should go. If he should recover, and regain his power, then to have sent her to him in his sickness will earn his goodwill. And if he dies——. That childhood marriage of hers to Sforza. "Annulled" because of "non-consummation". Yes, we can use that. Yes! (*Briskly.*) If she goes to Rome

and Cesar Borgia dies, then we can repudiate your marriage.

ESTE (*expressionless*): Yes. (*There is a pause.*) Shall I delay my journey?

ERCOLE: No, no, go while you can. When you are Duke, you will have to stay with the Treasury, as I do, because there is no one you can trust to count the coins without pocketing a handful every hundred! Go while you can!

ESTE (*calmly*): Then I had better be on my way.

ERCOLE: Yes, yes, I will set you on the road. (*He goes towards the door.*)

[*Este goes out.*]

You won't delay writing to me? Send a letter whenever the opportunity——

[*As he reaches the door, Pietro shows in Cesar, who comes in, disguised as a Captain, with a wide-brimmed hat pulled low, and a cloak with collar turned up.*]

PIETRO: Another messenger from Rome, my Lord.

ERCOLE: Who are you? What do you want? Who let you in?

PIETRO: He brings a message for Her Excellency, the Madonna Lucretia.

ERCOLE: God's blood, you would think the Ducal Palace was an Inn Yard! Well, we can't delay now! Pietro, you see to it.

[*He goes out, muttering, through the courtyard. Pietro goes out by the door, looking doubtfully at Cesar, who stands turned away from him. Cesar throws back his cloak and takes his hat off and throws it down. He is very white and drawn, all his vitality gone. He goes and leans on the back of a chair in exhaustion. Lucretia comes in and stops at*

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

the sight of him, although his back is turned to her, and his head bent down.]

LUCRETIA: What do you——? Cesar! (*She runs to him.*) Cesar!

[As he turns, she sees his face, and cries out.]

CESAR: There is nothing to be afraid of.

LUCRETIA: Corella said you were—You are still very ill.

CESAR (*drawing away*): No, I'm well enough now.

LUCRETIA: Come and sit down.

CESAR: No, it is too cold to sit down.

[He pulls his cloak about him. Lucretia looks at him in dismay, saying voicelessly, "Cold?"]

LUCRETIA (*after a moment*): Is it all lost, Cesar?

CESAR: Lost? While I am alive?

LUCRETIA: What will you do?

CESAR: Get a safe-conduct to go to Naples.

LUCRETIA (*softly*): Naples!

CESAR: Yes. Until I see how the fighting goes there, I must be neutral. If the French win, then I have assured Louis of my friendship. But if the Spaniards win——

[He lifts his head, showing his teeth.]

LUCRETIA: If the Spaniards win——

CESAR: Ah! *Then* I shall offer my services to Gonzalo de Cordoba. He will have an army there in Naples, ready for action. Let him give me command of that army. I am sending Corella and Taddeo into the Romagna with what troops we can scrape together. Let them hold the Romagna for me, and I will march

into Tuscany, take Milan, and drive the French out of the Peninsula. Then I will teach the Florentines a lesson they will not soon forget! Do they turn against me, thinking I have no strength? They will find that I have strength enough to crack their city like a walnut!

LUCRETIA (*smiling to see him himself again*): Cesar!

[*He is suddenly tired, and sits down, resting his forehead on his clasped hands.*]

CESAR: But now it is only to get to Naples.

LUCRETIA (*coming to kneel beside him*): What shall I do? Shall I come with you?

CESAR: No. Stay here. Hold Ferrara true to me—or at least keep the old man from joining the alliance against me.

LUCRETIA: Yes, I can do that.

CESAR: And his daughter, too.

LUCRETIA: Isabella? But she hates me!

[*Cesar straightens and looks at her.*]

CESAR: Then you must make her love you. We need her husband. We need Mantua.

LUCRETIA: I will do my best.

CESAR (*smiling*): Less than that should suffice. Don't they say we Borgias have never lost a friend?—except by death! (*He laughs.*) Is Michellotto still here?

LUCRETIA: Captain Corella? Yes, he's outside.

[*She goes towards the entrance and calls out.*]

Pietro!

[*Pietro comes to the entrance.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

PIETRO: Madonna?

LUCRETIA: Bring Michellotto Corella here, will you?

PIETRO: Yes, Madonna. (*As he turns away, he sees Cesar.*) My Lord!

CESAR (*idly, smiling*): Am I your Lord?

[*Pietro hesitates, bows, and goes out.*]

LUCRETIA: I wish Sancia hadn't died.

CESAR: Yes. She would have been useful to me in Naples now.

LUCRETIA: Could the fever not have waited? Only twenty-seven years of life for Sancia, who loved life.

CESAR: It was better so. It's a cold world for butterflies when summer is over.

LUCRETIA (*sighing*): It's a cold world.

CESAR (*looking at her quickly*): Not for us! (*He holds out his hand, and she comes and puts hers in it.*) Not for us.

[*Pietro comes in and bows.*]

PIETRO: He is coming, my—Lord.

CESAR: Good.

LUCRETIA: Cesar. (*She hesitates.*) Where did you leave my son?

CESAR (*without looking up*): In Rome.

LUCRETIA: May I have him here with me?

CESAR: No. Better not. (*He glances up at her.*) I've betrothed him to the daughter of Prospero Colonna.

LUCRETIA (*horrified*): Rodrigo? Colonna—your enemy? But that's dangerous for him!

CESAR: I don't think so. Anyway, it was necessary.

[*She walks away, clasping her hands, and then turns back and looks at him.*]

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA: Cesar, must you go to Naples?

CESAR (*carelessly*): What?

LUCRETIA: Couldn't you take refuge in Spain for a while?

CESAR: And be penned up there with a ring through my nose, like an old bull in a pasture? Not I!

[*Pietro suddenly lifts his head.*]

LUCRETIA: You would be safe there, at least.

CESAR (*amused*): Huh! As to that, I should be safe in the grave, but I don't seek to go there!

LUCRETIA: Couldn't you—Cesar, couldn't you be satisfied to live for a little while in obscurity?

CESAR: Obscurity?

[*He stands up and takes a step or two about the room, and then stops and speaks, softly and clearly, leaning on the back of the chair, and sometimes pausing to get his breath. But what he says now, on the edge of death, is more forceful than his more flowing and energetic speeches, made in health and vigour.*]

CESAR: Our lives are bounded by obscurity. It is the mockery of God that we are what we are and live so short a time—as though the ocean must be contained in a wine-bottle. And, what is worse, the meanest peasant, scratching in the earth for sustenance, like a pig for truffles, can live as long as a Borgia, forcing us, at his last breath, and ours, down to equality! But we can cheat death! By the brilliance of our lives, we can extend that miserable span of sixty years out into the memory of man, until it glitters like eternity. As for that other kind of immortality, which men say lies in the hand of God, how could I claim that, who was born God's enemy? Besides, one must kneel to obtain it, and I have never

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

been used to kneeling. But this continuance one can command! The House of Borgia is already memorable. When the worms have eaten us to the bare bone, we shall be remembered, and the manner of our living. Who before us had such painters—Raphael, Tintoretto, Titian, Leonardo da Vinci? Such poets and scholars? Who before us lived in the midst of so much beauty—such beautiful houses, clothes and jewels—such beautiful women! We shall not be forgotten. But do you ask me now to sit down upon that memory, like a dog half across the stream when he finds the bridge is broken? No! I have soared thirty years out into the world, and if I drop now, I shall destroy all that has gone before. (*Softly.*) I must complete the span.

LUCRETIA: But it is so dangerous.

CESAR (*straightening*): There is one great hazard which threatens us all—to live without distinction, and to die unremembered. I fear no other danger.

[*Michellotto comes in, and bows.*]

MICHELLOTTO: My Lord!

CESAR: Ah, Michellotto. You are to join Taddeo del Volpe and lead the troops into the Romagna.

MICHELLOTTO: Yes, my Lord. Have we a safe-conduct through Tuscany?

CESAR: No. You will have to cut your way through as best you can.

MICHELLOTTO: Yes, my Lord.

CESAR: Keep the Romagna for me, and I will find an army somewhere and drive through to join you. Then, between us, we will conquer all Italy.

[*He throws back his cloak and staggers a little.*]

Phew! It is hot in here! Is there no air in Ferrara?

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

[*He holds on to the chair. The other three exchange glances.*]

LUCRETIA: You didn't come alone, did you? Where is Burchard?

CESAR (*amused*): Serving the new Pope now.

LUCRETIA: Ah, no!

CESAR: What else? Burchard is one who saves the world from anarchy at the expense of his own soul. We should be grateful to him.

[*Pietro limps forward.*]

PIETRO: My Lord, let me come with you.

CESAR: What, my poet? You think it's time for you to return to me?

PIETRO: If you will trust me.

CESAR: I trust no one. But if you offer me service, I will accept it.

PIETRO: I ask no more. We must serve whom we can and believe in what we may. It is better than serving nobody and believing nothing.

[*Cesar smiles, and puts a hand on his shoulder, and then turns towards Lucretia.*]

CESAR: I must be going. (*He kisses her.*) Goodbye. While I live, you shall hear from me.

[*He goes towards courtyard. She starts after him.*]

LUCRETIA: Cesar! Stay here for tonight, at least!

[*He stands looking back for a moment, gravely, and then smiles.*]

CESAR: There is too much to do, and too little time in which to do it.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[*He goes out, followed by Michellotto, who bows to Lucretia as he goes.*]

LUCRETIA (*gazing after him*): Ah, Cesar!

[*Pietro picks up Cesar's hat, and hesitates.*]

PIETRO: Goodbye, Madonna.

[*Lucretia holds out her hand. He comes and kisses it. As he steps back—*]

LUCRETIA: Pietro, ask the Donna Isabella if she would honour me with her presence here.

Curtain

Scene 2

The same. A year later.

Donna Isabella, dressed in black, sits with her embroidery, and Lucretia sits at a desk, writing a letter. Presently Lucretia lays down her pen.

LUCRETIA: How can I write to him, when I don't know if the letter will even reach him? It is months since I heard from him. Even now, as I write the words, "My dearest brother", he may be dead!

ISABELLA: If he were dead, we should have heard.

LUCRETIA: For Cesar to be in prison! It's so unnatural that I'm almost afraid to think of it, as though if *that* could happen, nothing is safe. (*She gets up and moves desperately about the room, and then stands still.*)

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

Cesar, who has always gone where he would, and done what he pleased, for him to be shut up now in a box—four steps this way, five steps that, a guard on the door, and the window barred—how will he endure it?

ISABELLA: We will hope it won't be for long.

LUCRETIA (*moving again*): To have come so close to success—safely arrived in Naples, and the Spaniards victorious, and he in command of the army, ready to march into Tuscany—and then, *then* through the cowardice of Ferdinand of Naples and the treachery of Gonzalo——

ISABELLA: They say, even now, Gonzalo cannot bear to have his part in it spoken of.

LUCRETIA (*fiercely*): I hope in God's name that betrayal may torment his death-bed!

ISABELLA: Hush! What is done is done. Now we must win his freedom. You know my husband has written again to Louis of France, begging him to intervene.

LUCRETIA: You and Francesco have been infinitely kind. (*She comes to kiss her.*)

ISABELLA: We wish we could do more.

[*Lucretia straightens and stands behind her chair, gazing into the distance.*]

LUCRETIA: Wouldn't you think that prison walls would crumble beneath so many desires for his freedom? Can they withstand such a thunder of loyalty? Scipione publishing throughout Christendom a challenge in defence of Cesar's good name. Taddeo del Volpe in a Florentine prison refusing to speak against him. Dionigio di Naldo, still wearing Cesar's device, even though he has entered the service of Venice, and swearing that he will do so until he dies. Michellotto Corella, silent under torture, still faithful to him. Is all this nothing?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

ISABELLA (*glancing up at her, and speaking with a hint of reserve*): Indeed, he is greatly loved.

LUCRETIA (*moving away*): I wish that love were cannon-balls. Then he would be free.

[*Isabella stops working, sighs, and folds her hands on her embroidery in her lap.*]

ISABELLA: Well, Lucretia, this has been a sad visit of mine. But at least my father's death means that Alfonso will soon be returning. You have heard from him?

LUCRETIA (*wearily*): Yes. He wrote to say that he would cut short his stay in England and come straight home.

ISABELLA: Then he will be here almost at once. That is good news.

LUCRETIA: Yes. Very good. (*She moves restlessly.*) The sun is becoming quite hot. Soon the summer will be here, and all the heat and dust, and every day that glare in the sky. I think I shall wash my hair.

ISABELLA (*half-amused, half-anxious*): Won't you finish your letter first?

LUCRETIA (*pausing on her way out, and looking back*): No. If he is alive, he knows that I am thinking of him. If he is dead, will a letter bring him back to life?

[*She goes out. Isabella sighs and shakes her head. She folds up her embroidery and gets up, just as Lucretia returns, transformed, holding a letter.*]

LUCRETIA (*laughing and crying*): He is alive! He is alive and well!

[*She runs to Isabella, who catches her in her arms.*]

ISABELLA (*smiling*): You've news of him?

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

LUCRETIA: A letter in his own hand! See here! He is free! He is free!

ISABELLA: He has been released? Oh, that is excellent news!

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Released? No! He escaped! He escaped! Of course Cesar would escape!

[*She walks away, reading the letter. Isabella looks dubious, but then smiles.*]

ISABELLA: Oh. Well, anyway, I am very glad that he is free. Where is he now? He'll take refuge in Spain, of course.

LUCRETIA (*turning to look at her*): Refuge? Cesar? No! No! No, he is in Navarre!

ISABELLA (*startled*): Navarre! But what will he—what does he mean to do?

LUCRETIA (*reading gaily from the letter*): "I expect Jean of Navarre to do me the service of a brother-in-law, and to give me what I want, which is the command of an army."

ISABELLA: An army! But I thought all that was finished.

LUCRETIA (*laughing*): Finished? It is only just beginning. (*She walks about clasping the letter to her.*) He will throw both France and Spain out of the country, and settle the feuds between the Lords of Navarre. And then, with an army at his disposal, he will march into the Romagna. The cities will at once revolt, and everywhere open their gates to him. And those who have followed him before will come from all quarters of Italy to join him again. There is no ending to what he can do, now that he is free!

[*Isabella stands and looks at her with a face of stone.*]

ISABELLA: No. No ending to it. So, after all, it was not my husband's efforts which set him free.

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

LUCRETIA (*flashing a brief, dazzling smile*): I shall always be so grateful to you, and so will Cesar. (*She moves towards the desk.*) I must write to him at once.

[*Isabella moves to go out, and pauses, looking back.*]

ISABELLA: You will scarcely need us now. We—Estes—have served our turn.

[*Lucretia is re-reading the letter.*]

LUCRETIA: "All is well. You shall hear from me."
(*Laughing.*) Ah, Cesar!

[*Isabella goes out. Lucretia, suddenly becoming aware that she has spoken, turns round.*]

Isabella?

[*She finds her gone, smiles, and turns back to the desk. She tears up the letter she had begun, and starts to write. Pietro comes in, tired, dusty and worn.*]

PIETRO: Madonna.

LUCRETIA (*turning round quickly*): Pietro! But—
(*Turning back.*) —you are too late. I already know your news.

PIETRO (*looking at her quickly*): Madonna?

LUCRETIA (*writing*): A Spanish gentleman has just arrived here. He brought a letter from the Lord Cesar, which I am now answering.

PIETRO: Don't answer it, Madonna.

LUCRETIA (*turning, pen in hand*): What?

PIETRO: He will never read your letter.

[*Lucretia slowly rises, putting down her pen and staring at him.*]

LUCRETIA (*whispering*): Pietro!

PIETRO: He is dead, Madonna.

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

[*Lucretia moves across the room, clasping her hands and speaking in a still, hoarse voice.*]

LUCRETIA: No. No.

PIETRO: In a little brawl between the Lords of Navarre, outside a place called Viana that no one has ever heard of.

[*Lucretia sits down.*]

LUCRETIA (*dazedly*): What happened?

PIETRO: Louis de Beaumont was in revolt against the King. My Lord Cesar, as Captain-General of Navarre, took the field against him. There was an alarm, and my Lord was first to horse. He rode headlong to the Puerto del Sol, caught up with the rear-guard of the Beaumonts and cut his way through them, and straight into the main body of Beaumont's soldiers. Surrounded, unhorsed, still fighting, all alone, he was killed in the bright sunshine of a March morning.

LUCRETIA: Killed! (*Wonderingly.*) Killed?

PIETRO: Some say his horse ran away with him, but I think it was rather life which ran away with him—that same glow of living which carries the bull's feet dancing into the sun-lit arena, and which, in the Lord Cesar, would not let him gutter out like a candle, but sent him flaming down like a sunset—blood, glory and ambition all together there in the dust outside the Puerto del Sol of Viana.

LUCRETIA (*in a great cry of horror*): Cesar!

PIETRO: We buried him before the High Altar of Sainte Marie de Viane, and I wrote the inscription on his tomb. (*He smiles sadly.*) The last service which a poet can perform for any man is to write his epitaph. (*He takes a paper out of his pocket and holds it out to Lucretia.*) Would you read it, Madonna?

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

[*Lucretia takes it without looking at it. She stares straight ahead.*]

LUCRETIA: Oh God, I am alone!

PIETRO: Madonna?

LUCRETIA: The Borgias have built a world of terror, and left me alone in it!

PIETRO (*horrified*): Why, Madonna——! (*Urgently.*) Ah, Madonna! Now, his fame is in your hands.

LUCRETIA: No, he is in God's hands now.

PIETRO: And if, as he said, God is his enemy?

LUCRETIA (*wildly*): Then that is one alliance I must join against him! (*Getting up in a panic.*) What shall I do? What will become of me? Where shall I go to be safe?

PIETRO (*startled, and at a loss*): Why—you—there is your husband, Madonna.

LUCRETIA (*turning on him*): My husband! Do you think he won't repudiate the marriage now? There is that old childhood marriage and divorce of mine, if he needed a pretext—but he doesn't need one now. I am a Borgia. That is enough! (*Calling to him.*) Cesar! Cesar! (*Turning on Pietro again.*) He isn't dead! You were mistaken! It isn't possible that he should be dead!

PIETRO (*in a low voice*): I laid his body in the coffin myself.

[*Lucretia walks about.*]

LUCRETIA: I shall appeal to Pope Julio—throw myself on his mercy. But what mercy did he show Cesar? (*Her panic increases. She begins to sob, dry-eyed.*) Cesar! Oh, Cesar! What will become of me? Don't leave me! Don't leave me alone!

[*Alfonso d'Este comes in, in travelling dress.*]

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

My Lord!

ESTE (*to Pietro*): Is it true?

[*Lucretia shrinks away from him.*]

PIETRO: The Duke of Romagna is dead.

ESTE: Are you sure?

PIETRO: I buried him myself.

ESTE: H'm.

[*Este walks about, heaves an irritable sigh, and tosses down his riding-whip. Lucretia keeps her eyes fixed on him. She several times takes a breath to speak, and does so at last.*]

LUCRETIA: My Lord, I—I don't know what you mean to do——

ESTE (*coldly, glancing at her*): To do?

LUCRETIA (*trembling and twisting her hands together*): I know the marriage was forced upon you. I haven't been—— And the child died. But now——

[*Este walks to the window and stands looking out. Pietro stands in the shadows, pitying but dismayed. Lucretia moves restlessly about.*]

I couldn't bear to be imprisoned for the rest of my life!

[*Este turns to look at her in silence.*]

You are thinking of all the people Cesar imprisoned (*As though he is accusing her.*) I always pitied them! But it isn't enough, is it? To pity people and not try to help them. (*Wildly.*) But what could I have done, except—— (*Suddenly hopeless.*) —not be myself?

[*Este makes no reply, but still stands looking at her.*]

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

(*Turning to him in a moment of hope.*) You said once, if I needed you—and now I do! (*She suddenly cries out in an agony of loss and despair.*) But it's too late now, isn't it? Now, it's too late! (*She turns towards him in a last desperate appeal.*) Do what you like with me! Send me away—or to a convent—anywhere! Only, put me in a place of safety.

ESTE (*without moving*): You will be quite safe here.

LUCRETIA (*wildly*): Safe? How can you say that? I have never known safety, and now it has gone for ever. All the petty tyrants of Italy—the Pope himself—all the enemies that Cesar made during his thirty years of life——! I'm like a man in a dark room, all alone, while a hundred assassins creep towards him up the stairs. Safe! (*Suddenly standing still and straight, looking at him.*) Have you forgotten who I am? I am Lucretia di Borgia.

[*Este speaks after a pause, very quietly and steadily.*]

ESTE: You are the Duchess of Ferrara—and my wife.

LUCRETIA (*in a trembling voice*): My Lord?

ESTE (*with a note of tenderness and reassurance*): You are my wife.

[*There is another second of silence, and then Lucretia cries out and stumbles towards him. Este comes to meet her and catches her in his arms. As she moves, the paper with the inscription on Cesar's tomb falls to the ground.*]

LUCRETIA (*bursting into real tears*): He is dead! Cesar is dead!

ESTE: Yes, he is dead. Even he can make no more demands upon you now. (*He holds her quiet in his arms for a moment.*) Let me take you to your room.

[*He leads her towards the exit. She checks, glances back at*

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

Pietro, takes a few more steps, and then suddenly clasps her hands and cries out.]

LUCRETIA: Oh, God!

ESTE: It is all over, Lucretia.

LUCRETIA: Oh, God, forgive him! God, forgive him!

[Este stops short. She goes on without him, still clasping her hands and speaking with sobs all the way out.]

God, forgive him! God, forgive him! God, forgive him! God, forgive him! God, forgive him! God, forgive him!

[She goes out. Her voice fades down echoing corridors. Este glances back at Pietro, and then slowly follows her. Pietro comes forward and picks up the paper from the floor. He reads it through, and then slowly crumples it, lets it fall to the ground, glancing up at the audience and bowing.]

Curtain

LET THEM EAT CAKE

A Comedy in Three Acts

by

FREDERICK LONSDALE

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Gilbert Miller*

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ENOUGH) by Frederick Lonsdale*

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The first British production took place at the Theatre Royal, Windsor, on July 4th, 1958, under the title *Half a Loaf*, with the following cast:

ERIC LINDON	<i>Terence Bayler</i>
MORTON	<i>Geoffrey Tyrrell</i>
LADY PLYNNE (DOROTHY)	<i>Diana Hope</i>
LORD RAYNE (REGGIE)	<i>Anthony Sharpe</i>
LORD WHITEHALL (HUGO)	<i>Lionel Gamlin</i>
LADY WHITEHALL (MOLLY)	<i>Margaret Ward</i>
LORD PLYNNE (ARCHIE)	<i>John Saunders</i>
LADY BLETCHLEY (EMILY)	<i>Margot Boyd</i>
DUCHESS OF HAMPSHIRE (NANCY)	<i>Ann Castle</i>
PAUL	<i>William Peacock</i>
CHARLES PLEYDELL	<i>Geoffrey Russell</i>
DUKE OF HAMPSHIRE (JOHNNY)	<i>Moray Watson</i>
LIZ PLEYDELL	<i>Moira Redmond</i>
A FOOTMAN	<i>Tony Ferris</i>

Directed by Alan Bridges
Settings designed by Hal Henshaw and painted by
Dian Montgomerie

The play was later presented by Emile Littler under the title *Let Them Eat Cake* at the Cambridge Theatre, London, on May 6, 1959, with the following cast:

ERIC LINDON, M.P.	<i>Humphrey Lestocq</i>
MORTON	<i>Austin Melford</i>
LADY PLYNNE (DOROTHY)	<i>Jean Lodge</i>
LORD RAYNE (REGGIE)	<i>Guy Middleton</i>
LORD WHITEHALL (HUGO)	<i>Henry Kendall</i>
LADY WHITEHALL (MOLLY)	<i>Patricia Burke</i>
LORD PLYNNE (ARCHIE)	<i>Claude Hulbert</i>
LADY BLETCHLEY (EMILY)	<i>Phyllis Neilson-Terry</i>
DUCHESS OF HAMPSHIRE (NANCY)	<i>Dulcie Gray</i>
PAUL	<i>James Sharkey</i>
CHARLES PLEYDELL	<i>Cyril Raymond</i>
DUKE OF HAMPSHIRE (JOHNNY)	<i>Michael Denison</i>

LIZ PLEYDELL

Eunice Gayson

MAIDS

Yvette Rees and Margery Weston

FOOTMEN

Gerald Dawson and Geoffrey Wren

Directed by Wallace Douglas

Settings by Doris Zinkeisen

CHARACTERS

(in order of their appearance)

ERIC LINDON

MORTON

LADY PLYNNE (DOROTHY)

LORD RAYNE (REGGIE)

LORD WHITEHALL (HUGO)

LADY WHITEHALL (MOLLY)

LORD PLYNNE (ARCHIE)

LADY BLETCHLEY (EMILY)

DUCHESS OF HAMPSHIRE (NANCY)

PAUL

CHARLES PLEYDELL

DUKE OF HAMPSHIRE (JOHNNY)

LIZ PLEYDELL

A FOOTMAN

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in the home of the Duke of Hampshire. Time: the 1920s.

ACT ONE

Sunday morning

ACT TWO

Afternoon, one month later

ACT THREE

That evening

[At the Cambridge Theatre, London, in May, 1959, the play, set in "the residence of the Duke of Hampshire, near Richmond", was put back to "Summer, 1913".]

ACT ONE

Time: Sunday morning.

Scene: The living room in the home of the Duke of Hampshire. Down right a large arch leading to hall and dining room. Stairs to the upper part of the house are visible through the arch. Centre in the right wall is a fireplace. Up stage of the fireplace a bookcase is built into the wall.

The back wall has a large French window in its centre and console tables right and left of the window. Down left is a door leading to the rest of the house. Against the left wall is a table desk and stool; down left a low-backed armchair. Left centre a baby grand piano with a kidney-shaped settee below it. A small low table in front of settee. Above and below the fireplace, right, are armchairs. In front of fireplace, a stool. To the right of the up right armchair is a small table.

At rise of curtain: Eric Lindon enters up centre and crosses to centre, where he is joined by the butler, Morton, who has entered right carrying morning papers on a salver.

MORTON (*crossing to Eric*): Sunday papers, sir?

ERIC: Thank you. (*Takes papers, crosses to settee, keeps one paper and puts others on table below settee.*)

[*Dorothy (Lady Plynne) enters from upstairs right.*]

DOROTHY: Good morning, Morton.

MORTON: Good morning, my lady. (*Exits right.*)

DOROTHY (*walks to settee, sits on right arm of it, bends down, kisses Eric*): Darling—I love you so much!

ERIC (*jumps up; crosses to right centre*): Dorothy, for God's sake, don't do that!

DOROTHY: Oh, how beastly of you!

ACT ONE

ERIC: Don't be ridiculous! Suppose your husband had come into the room and seen you kissing me?

DOROTHY (*amused*): Do tell me what you would have said?

ERIC: There's nothing to laugh at! Devoted as I am to you, you might remember your husband happens to be my greatest friend.

DOROTHY: When I left your greatest friend two minutes ago, he was lying peacefully in his bath!

ERIC: Oh!

DOROTHY: Always trust your girl friend. Eric, the news is good! Archie is shooting on Tuesday and will be away on Monday night. We can dine and go back to your flat.

ERIC (*obviously nervous and bored*): Yes, rather! I may have to go back to the House for a few minutes to vote just before eleven.

DOROTHY: In the interests of my country, I will wait patiently for your return! Eric, I've got something awfully nice to tell you! (*She rises and crosses towards Eric.*)

ERIC (*almost angrily he sidesteps her; crosses down left behind piano*): Will you stop being a damn fool, and stay where you are!

DOROTHY: You are a coward!

ERIC: Yes, I am! I've a horror of people knowing my private life! Supposing Nancy had suddenly come in——

DOROTHY: Nancy has gone to church with her children!

ERIC (*left end piano*): Well, anyway, I wish you would remember that I have a political future I don't want completely ruined!

DOROTHY: Very well! I'll be good! But I do think you're selfish! (*Eric sits left end settee; starts reading.*) By the way, what was the matter with Liz last night? (*She crosses toward settee. Eric starts to rise.*) It's all

right, all right! Don't be alarmed! (*Eric sinks back. Dorothy sits right end settee.*)

ERIC: To burst into tears for no apparent reason, and rush from the dining table, looks like the beginning of a nervous breakdown to me!

DOROTHY: It does, rather! By the way, you lost quite a lot at bridge last night, sweet!

ERIC: That Russian feller held all the cards.

DOROTHY (*starting to put her arm around Eric*): He played them superbly!

ERIC (*rises; crosses to front of fireplace*): He plays all right. Why did Nancy and Johnny ask him here?

DOROTHY: Molly asked if she might bring him!

[*Lord Rayne is seen through windows centre.*]

ERIC: Oh—a new gink of Molly's!

[*Reggie (Lord Rayne) enters centre; crosses to right end settee.*]

REGGIE (*looking about the room*): Good God—another room without a drop of port in it!

DOROTHY: How awful for you!

REGGIE: I can understand Nancy not realizing the importance of a glass of port at twelve noon—but Johnny ought to know!

DOROTHY: If Eric rings for it, will you stop talking about it? (*She motions to Eric, who rings bell, upper end fireplace.*)

REGGIE: Kind of you! I wish to make a statement—I am not enjoying my week-end at all!

ERIC: Odd—I'm enjoying it enormously!

REGGIE (*patting Dorothy's hand*): As you have Dorothy to comfort you, I sympathize!

ERIC (*angrily*): What the hell do you mean by that?

REGGIE: Dear old boy, aren't you being a little

ACT ONE

grotesque? (*Again pats her hand.*) Don't you think we know?

ERIC (*crossing to centre*): You damn swine, I——

REGGIE: Dorothy, do ask your boy friend to spare a little sand for the other ostriches!

ERIC (*angrily crossing toward Reggie*): Look here, Reggie——

DOROTHY: Eric! (*Rises quickly; crosses between them; pushes Eric right.*) Why do you take any notice of a half-wit like Reggie?

REGGIE: Thank you, Dorothy—I hate scenes! (*Crossing to left end settee, sits.*) My complaint is I find myself here entirely alone—if I'd thought for a moment, I'd have brought my wife!

[*Dorothy crosses to right end piano.*]

ERIC: You are without question the most unmitigated cad I know! (*Crosses to chair down right; sits.*)

REGGIE: I'm sorry you think that, old boy—and I don't believe you're right.

[*Enter Morton right.*]

Port, please!

[*Morton bows; exits right.*]

I don't know why I ever come here. Nancy dislikes me intensely—has a great contempt for me, in fact! Tell me, how have she and Johnny lasted so long—she's not a bit his type! Curious!

ERIC (*indignantly*): She only happens to be one of the very nicest women in the world!

DOROTHY: Stop being a fool, Reggie—Johnny adores her—they're the only two divinely happy people I know! I adore Nancy!

REGGIE: My fault, I suppose! I never could get on with good women—always bored me!

LET THEM EAT CAKE

[*Dorothy crosses up centre to windows.*]

Another thing has annoyed me frightfully—I took that Russian feller on at bezique last night—my game—but he held all the cards, and it cost me a packet!

ERIC: You mean it cost your wife a packet!

REGGIE: I say, old boy—you are in a bad mood!

[*Hugo (Lord Whitehall) enters right from upstairs.*]

HUGO (*crossing centre*): My God, I've got a liver!
(*Crosses up right centre, then back to right centre.*)

[*Morton enters right; carries tray with port decanter and glasses; crosses to Reggie. Dorothy crosses down left to left end piano; takes magazine.*]

REGGIE: Sorry, Hugo, old boy! (*Rises and takes port.*)
I thank you! (*Sits.*)

[*Morton starts up centre, ignoring Hugo.*]

HUGO: I say, what do you think you're doing?

[*Morton returns to left of Hugo.*]

Anything the matter with you? (*Takes a glass of port.*)

MORTON: Your Lordship particularly asked me last night to ignore you at all times when I was passing the port!

HUGO: You're old enough not to take any notice of a damn silly statement like that, aren't you? Thank you! (*Crosses and sits right on settee.*) Curious thing about this part of the country—always gives me a liver!

[*Morton puts port on console table up right, then exits right.*]

ACT ONE

REGGIE: Hugo, tell me, has your horse got a chance at Newmarket on Wednesday?

HUGO: He'll win—but I have to say I've been saying that about the damn thing for the last two years—curious how some horses keep inspiring one with confidence!

REGGIE: Rather the same as politicians like Eric—always full of promise!

ERIC (*rising and crossing to fireplace*): You damned half-wit!

DOROTHY: Eric, will you stop!

HUGO: No—I think Eric ought to be allowed to answer that—(*To Eric*.) Go on, old boy—I like politics—you got as far as “damned half-wit”!

DOROTHY (*crossing and sitting down left chair*): Stop it, Hugo!

[*Mollie (Lady Whitehall) enters centre; carries a golf stick.*]

MOLLY: Good morning! (*Walks to Hugo; kisses him on forehead.*) Well, sweet husband—I hope you had a good night?

[*Both Hugo and Reggie make feeble efforts to rise but soon sink back on to settee.*]

HUGO: First class! My liver kept me asleep until a quarter past ten!

[*Molly addresses an imaginary golf ball centre.*]

I went into your room to have breakfast with you, but you weren't there!

MOLLY (*raises head*): I hope you noticed my bed had been slept in, darling?

HUGO: That wouldn't mean anything—you'd have ruffled it up all right!

MOLLY: True! (*Turns to him.*) I rose at eight-thirty and played golf from nine till ten with Paul!

HUGO: You got up at half past eight to play golf with that Russian?

MOLLY: I did! (*Addresses ball again.*)

REGGIE: You haven't fallen for that awful feller, have you, Molly?

MOLLY (*turns to them*): Don't be childish—can't one have a great man friend without falling for him?

REGGIE: No!

HUGO: Of course you can't—it isn't possible! } (*Together.*)

MOLLY: I've never heard such rot—poor man exiled from his own country—no friends—no money—how could one help being nice to him? Don't you agree, Dorothy? (*Crosses up right centre; leaves golf club on chair.*)

DOROTHY: Darling, I admit he's attractive—but such an obvious adventurer!

REGGIE: Dreadful feller!

HUGO: I'm told when he was in America he lived on any number of rich women!

MOLLY (*leaning on chair up right*): Well, I can think of many more unattractive ways of spending money!

HUGO: Don't bring him to the house—that's all I ask!

MOLLY (*crossing and sitting down right*): I won't, sweet! Has anyone heard how Liz is this morning?

HUGO: I say, what was that all about last night—bursting into tears in the middle of dinner—jumping up right from the table—and going to bed!

MOLLY: I don't know—something upset her!

REGGIE: Charlie tells me she has been in an awful state of nerves for the last two months—he's getting fed up with these scenes!

HUGO (*to Molly*): You ought to get your Russian friend to take her away for a week-end of golf at Le Touquet, Molly!

ACT ONE

MOLLY: Darling! My own nerves are not all they should be!

[*Archie (Lord Plynne) enters right from upstairs.*]

ARCHIE (*crossing to centre to Dorothy*): Good morning, darling!

DOROTHY: Good morning, darling!

ARCHIE (*he doesn't look at anyone when he is talking*): I've just been talking to Willie on the telephone. 'E ain't very 'opeful about the shoot on Monday—he thinks a lot of the birds were drowned in that storm last week! Don't think I'll go!

DOROTHY: Archie, you must—he'll be so disappointed!

ARCHIE (*pause*): I suppose I'll have to! Awful thing to be brought up to keep one's word when one knows there ain't any birds, what? (*He turns; starts to walk away up centre.*)

DOROTHY: Where are you going, darling?

ARCHIE: I'm not certain—I think the gardens! (*Exit out windows centre.*)

REGGIE: I often wonder if Archie is as big a fool as he appears.

HUGO: He's a damn good shot!

[*Lady Bletchley enters right from upstairs. She is a woman of about sixty—a dominating personality, and full of vitality. Hugo and Reggie rise.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY (*crosses right centre*): I've been to church with Nancy and her children!

HUGO (*crosses centre*): I wish I had known, I——

LADY BLETCHLEY: Who do you think came with us? (*To Molly.*) Your Russian friend!

REGGIE: After the poor box, I suppose!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*crosses and sits settee*): Nothing of

LET THEM EAT CAKE

the sort! One of the most charming men I have met for years—obviously a villain—but quite delightful! (*Reggie sits beside Lady Bletchley.*) And what a charming voice—I got quite a thrill—which at my age is most unexpected—listening to him singing “Nearer My God to Thee”!

REGGIE: Show him a rich American woman, and I’m told he sings “Abide With Me” even better!

HUGO (*laughs*): That’s good, Reggie! (*Crosses up right and gets glass of port.*)

MOLLY (*to Lady Bletchley*): I’m glad you like him!

LADY BLETCHLEY: He’s obviously a horrid, dreadful man—but I like him awfully!

REGGIE: I’m sorry to hear you applauding him, Emily!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Don’t call me Emily!

REGGIE: Why not! I don’t mind you calling me Reggie!

LADY BLETCHLEY: There is a name I would like to call you by—but once in fun I called my husband by it and he was so shocked I’ve never used it since!

HUGO (*bringing glass to behind right chair*): You do cop it, old boy!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Where’s that tiresome little woman who fainted at dinner last night?

DOROTHY: Dunno—she hasn’t appeared yet!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Dear—dear—why can’t fainting women stay in bed and have their dinner there!

[*Duchess of Hampshire (Nancy) enters up centre carrying a few flowers. Reggie rises and crosses to left end settee.*]

NANCY (*crossing right centre*): Good morning!

ALL: Good morning!

NANCY (*showing flowers to Molly*): Aren’t they lovely?

MOLLY: Divine!

LADY BLETCHLEY: I’ve been telling them, Nancy,

ACT ONE

that charming Russian came to church with you and me and your children!

NANCY (*crosses to the right arm settee*): I like him so much, Molly!

REGGIE: Odd! Personally I fail to see his charm!

NANCY: If you had a quarter of it—you wouldn't have to talk nearly so much about your immense success with women—(*Smiles.*)—would you? (*She sits on arm settee. There is a pause.*)

LADY BLETCHLEY (*to Reggie*): Have you got it?

HUGO: I must say I like the sporting way Reggie takes an insult!

DOROTHY: How is Liz—have you heard?

NANCY: She's all right—I've just been to see her! Don't make fun of her, will you—she's terribly upset at having made such a stupid scene last night!

[*Paul enters right from hall.*]

PAUL (*crossing right centre to Reggie, Hugo and Dorothy*): Good morning!

MOLLY: I hear after you left me, you went to church?

PAUL: And I was much impressed. It was a charming ceremony and a most impressive service!

LADY BLETCHLEY: I don't think I've ever met a man with such a profound antipathy to adultery as that vicar!

PAUL: I go as far as to say if he's only a quarter right, the penalties should make a man of Lord Rayne's charm ponder deeply!

REGGIE: What do you mean by that?

PAUL: Please! With men of charm so rare, you must be subjected to many temptations we lesser men never know!

REGGIE: Is that so? (*Crosses to Paul.*) Well, personally, I'm going for a walk! (*Exits centre. All laugh.*)

NANCY: There's one good thing about his lack of repartee—it makes him take exercise! (*Crosses above piano; puts flowers in bowl.*)

ERIC (*laughs—puts newspaper on table by chair up right*): I hope I won't be accused of the same thing—but I should like a little exercise before lunch! (*Crosses above up right chair to window.*)

HUGO (*crosses down centre*): Why don't we all have a go at that croquet court?

LADY BLETCHLEY: Croquet—that's my game! (*Rises.*) I will at once put on my sports clothes—wait for me! (*Exits right and upstairs.*)

HUGO: She cheats like hell!—We've got a four. Let's get started before she gets down! You'll play, Molly?

[*Dorothy rises and crosses behind piano to up centre.*]

MOLLY: I'm tired!

[*Eric and Dorothy exit centre.*]

HUGO (*to Molly*): Nonsense!—Come on, please! (*Exits centre.*)

MOLLY (*rises and crosses up centre*): I hate croquet! Come and sit outside and watch us, Nancy!

NANCY: Yes, I will! (*Crosses and sits right arm settee.*)

[*Molly exits centre.*]

PAUL (*right centre*): Strange—but I have a most amazing capacity for emptying a room!

NANCY: That's your imagination!

PAUL (*shakes his head*): No—I am much disliked! Molly says it is because I have lived on a lot of rich women!

NANCY: Have you?

PAUL (*crossing to her a bit*): They would insist on treating me as a gentleman!

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NANCY (*laughs*): Bad luck! But I believe they offered it? (*Crosses to front of settee.*)

PAUL: I am grateful to you! (*Shakes his head.*) It is a terrible thing to be only an adventurer.

NANCY: Are you?

PAUL: How do I live if I am not?

NANCY: How do you? (*Sits settee.*)

PAUL (*crossing to her*): I will tell you—but you will never repeat it because I will be ruined!

NANCY (*laughs*): I promise!

PAUL (*sits by her*): When I come to Europe after the revolution—oh, I have a terrible time! Desperate, I happily discover that most men who play golf play the game so much better in drawing rooms than they do on golf courses—so I learn the game! Then I meet very ordinary men who play bridge well—so I take lessons at that game with my golf winnings!

NANCY: You play superbly!

PAUL: But that does not make me less stupid than the others! Then I meet men like Lord Rayne who can only play bezique—(*Pause.*)—I learn to remember every important card in those six packs! (*Pause.*) There!

NANCY: I know lots of others who try to do the same! But I never believed your reputation with women was true!

PAUL: Oh—I like women—but even if I did not, I would have to—it is the only way I can meet men! But in all, I am very happy! (*Looks at her.*) You are happy!

NANCY: I couldn't be more so!

PAUL: I like that—you have a charming husband——

NANCY: I adore him!

PAUL: I can understand that—and your two lovely children—if you will let me say so, you deserve happiness!

NANCY: I don't know why?

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PAUL: Because if I may say, most respectfully, you are one of the nicest women I have ever met!

NANCY: That's charming of you!

PAUL: The little woman who burst into tears last night—she——

NANCY (*her manner changes completely*): What about her?

PAUL: She is in love with someone?

NANCY: With her husband, I hope!

PAUL: Oh, she's not in love with him!

NANCY: You seem very certain?

PAUL: When your life is adventurous like mine, you are very observant! It is not admiration, she wants—no—I've tried that—no, she is in love!

NANCY (*looks at him*): Who is she in love with, then?

PAUL: I don't know! I only know her well enough to know she is a very stupid little woman—but I can see, physically very attractive!

[*Charles Pleydell enters right from upstairs; crosses to right centre.*]

CHARLES: Good morning!

NANCY: Good morning, Charles!

PAUL (*rises and crosses centre*): I hope your wife is better this morning?

CHARLES: Thanks, she is!

PAUL: I'm glad! (*To Nancy.*) Would you please forgive me if I want to play a little croquet? I have learnt the game!

NANCY: Of course!

[*Paul exits centre.*]

CHARLES (*looks after him, then crosses back to Nancy*): I rather like that feller!

NANCY (*surprised*): Charles?!—You are the only man I have ever heard say that!

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CHARLES: I know—the others say he's a gigolo—and lots of other things I believe to be equally untrue! Strikes me as an extremely intelligent and nice feller!

NANCY: I like him!

CHARLES: Nancy, I'm sorry Liz spoilt your dinner last night!

NANCY: Nonsense!—everybody was sorry for her! Her nerves are very bad, aren't they? (*Rising, takes writing pad from desk to piano.*)

CHARLES: Admittedly her nerves are bad—but bursting into tears and leaving a dinner table for no reason at all—it's inexcusable and unforgivable! (*Crossing right centre.*) I don't know what to do—everything I say is wrong—everything I do is wrong—frankly, I'm sick to death of it!

NANCY (*writing*): How long has she been like this?

CHARLES (*turns to her*): About two months!

NANCY: Perhaps you are seeing too much of each other?

CHARLES (*not looking at her*): Up to a month or so ago she never went anywhere without me—lately she occasionally spends a night with her mother—and last week dined with a girl who was ill.

NANCY (*looks at him*): Why don't you send her away for a change?

CHARLES: I've begged her to go—but she won't! Sometimes I think she's worrying about something—something on her mind—but she swears there isn't! (*Crossing to right and back to piano.*) I think it's these damn rotten friends of ours!

NANCY: Charles, really!—they're gay, jolly!—You're being ridiculous!

CHARLES: Jolly? (*Laughs ironically.*) Reggie—Hugo—Archie Plynne—God, what a crew! Not one of their wives have a symptom of fidelity to any of

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them—and they don't seem to care, which is so strange!

NANCY: They look at life in a very broad way!

CHARLES (*crossing down right centre*): Do they? Well, I don't. I'm old-fashioned! I should take the earliest advantage of the Divorce Court if I were in their place! You don't like them, Nancy?

NANCY: Of course I do—and Johnny likes them! (*Puts pad back on desk; crosses to left end settee.*)

CHARLES: I wonder if you'll like them as much when your daughter is about seventeen?

NANCY: I may not—but at the moment she's only five!

CHARLES: True!

[*Johnny enters right from upstairs. He is a man of about forty. He is dressed in an ordinary lounge suit. Crosses to Charles.*]

JOHNNY: I wish it to be known I have played tennis for one hour and a half!

NANCY (*crosses in front settee and sits at piano*): What's happened to you, Johnny?—tennis—no bread or potatoes—am I losing you, darling?

JOHNNY: I don't think so. Just health! (*To Charles.*) I hope Liz is better?

CHARLES: She says she is! I'd better go up and see her and find out what she is going to do. (*Crosses down right.*)

JOHNNY (*firmly*): Make her come down to lunch!

CHARLES: I'll try, but God knows if I'll succeed! (*Exits right and upstairs.*)

JOHNNY (*turns; watches him going out*): No one can say he's not a gloomy devil!

NANCY: He's going through rather a difficult time! (*Pause.*) Aren't you glad you didn't marry a woman who suffers from nerves, Johnny?

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JOHNNY (*shakes his head*): Poor little thing!

NANCY: Which of us?

JOHNNY: Liz!

NANCY: Oh! (*Pause. Johnny crosses up to console table up right.*) Why are you so sorry for her, darling?

JOHNNY: Being of a nervous disposition myself, I have the greatest sympathy with others who are!

NANCY: Johnny dear—I've noticed many other of your limitations—but never nervousness!

JOHNNY (*pours glass of port*): Only because one was brought up never to wear one's nerves on one's sleeve, so to speak! What do you think is the matter with her?

NANCY: Nothing!

JOHNNY (*raising his voice*): A woman can't suddenly burst into tears—walk out of a——

NANCY (*shakes her head*): An inability to be bored intelligently!

JOHNNY (*with evident pleasure*): I love old Charles—but I must admit he's an awful bore!

NANCY: You must be more tolerant—what man wouldn't be after five years of married life!

JOHNNY: What do you mean by that? (*Puts decanter down—crosses centre to right of her.*) I've been married to you for seven!

NANCY: And I have never regretted it once, Johnny dear—well, that is speaking metaphorically!

JOHNNY: I bore you!?

NANCY (*stops playing*): I bore you! (*Pause.*) That's why I never complain when you leave me here and go to London for three or four days at a time—and, you may have noticed, never ask you what you have done when you return! (*Begins to play.*)

JOHNNY: I would be delighted to tell you everything I have done!

NANCY (*stops playing*): Johnny, how sweet of you—would you like to start now!?

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JOHNNY: You're not suggesting I ever do anything that you wouldn't approve of, are you? (*Crosses behind piano to left end.*)

NANCY: I might not approve—but I hope I would be very understanding and forgiving!

JOHNNY: Really? Then supposing I were to tell you—and I haven't, remember—that I'd tucked up with half a dozen women since I have been married to you—I am to understand you wouldn't mind?

NANCY: Naturally one's vanity would make one mind very much—but I hope my common sense would make me very sympathetic!

JOHNNY (*crosses and sits chair down left*): My God, I'm a fool—I only said at dinner last night nothing could ever shock me again!

NANCY: Johnny, do stop talking such damn nonsense! Do you suppose during the seven years I have been married to you I have never seen a man I'd like to go away with for a short weekend?

JOHNNY: Nancy—stop—I——

NANCY: So why should I be such a fool as to suppose you haven't seen women equally attractive? I am trying to tell you, darling, I'm not a dog in the manger!

JOHNNY (*crosses to below chair up right—puts down glass*): Nancy—please!—you're offending me more than I can tell you!

NANCY: Sorry—I thought after all these years of married life we could at all events talk quite honestly!

JOHNNY (*crosses right centre*): I don't understand you this morning—and I would be very glad if you would not add to my irritation by playing a piano!

NANCY: Sorry! (*She looks at him—pause.*)

JOHNNY: You've upset me, Nancy. I think I shall go and join the others! (*Crosses up centre to windows.*)

NANCY: Do, darling!

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JOHNNY (*stops; comes back to her*): Am I to understand you have been away for a weekend?

NANCY: Really, Johnny, if I had—do you suppose I would tell you? (*Pause.*)—You are so easily shocked!

JOHNNY: Nancy—have you ever been away for a weekend?

NANCY: Have you?

JOHNNY (*with great emphasis—turns away*): Never!

NANCY: I hoped you would say that, darling! And without feeling it necessary to be so emphatic, I never have! All I say is, I have seen men I wouldn't have been very upset if I'd had to!

JOHNNY: This is a charming revelation!

NANCY: Darling, you are a fool! Can't you see I'm only trying to tell you why I'd be understanding about it if you had?

JOHNNY: Well, I haven't! (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

NANCY: You couldn't make me more happy! I hate the thought of you ever thinking of anyone else but me!

JOHNNY: But as you have chosen to bring up this subject—let me tell you—if I'd ever been unfaithful to you—I have had severe provocation!

NANCY (*rises—picks up glasses from piano*): Darling—how terribly interesting—in what way?

JOHNNY: You wouldn't describe yourself as a demonstrative woman, would you?

NANCY: Would you describe yourself as a demonstrative man?

JOHNNY: I could be!

NANCY: Then I think you ought to be ashamed of yourself—(*Puts on glasses.*) Why have you kept it a secret from me all these years?

JOHNNY: What encouragement do I get—if—I—er—er——

NANCY (*a step centre*): Go on, sweet—don't be shy—speak up!—we are all alone!

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JOHNNY (*at fireplace*): If I walk into your room at night—you start telling me something about the children—or the butler got tight—or you can't understand why you are so tired—many a night I've gone back to my room, got into bed and said to myself, "So this is romance!"

NANCY: My excuse is—the lack of any preliminaries suggested you only wanted to talk!

JOHNNY: I knew you'd have an answer! But it's all right—as one grows older, one understands. I realize now it's not your fault—like most English women, you were born without temperament!

NANCY: How do you know I was born without temperament?

JOHNNY: Good God, haven't I been married to you for seven years!

NANCY: But that doesn't prove I was born without temperament!

JOHNNY (*outraged—crosses to her*): Nancy—are you telling me that it is my fault—it is I who am the failure?

NANCY: I have been trying to tell you in every possible way for the last ten minutes that it isn't either of our faults! But if you ever have the inclination to make an Italian roll on the floor with laughter, tell him Englishwomen have no temperament!

JOHNNY: If I thought for a moment it was I who had failed—I'd give you your freedom tomorrow!

NANCY: That, darling, would be a damn silly thing to do—because in a few years' time you'd be in precisely the same position with another woman, and I with another man!

JOHNNY: God, what cynicism! (*Crosses and sits chair down right.*)

NANCY (*crosses and sits at piano*): Don't be absurd, Johnny! Either a man is angry because his wife

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lacks temperament, or anxious because she has too much—the damn thing is never right!

JOHNNY: Nancy, I must ask——

NANCY (*stops playing*): There is a story told of one of the most attractive women in the world—her husband complained so bitterly that she lacked temperament, that she eventually agreed to divorce him. On the day that he was free, he married a Spanish lady, and six months afterwards was found dead in the snow in Norway! (*Stops playing.*) I tell you the damn thing is never right!

JOHNNY: So I am to understand there is no such thing as permanent love in this life?

NANCY (*crosses and sits on stool by fireplace*): Of course there is! I have it for you. You're divine to me—generous—terribly good fun—and I would rather be with you than any man I know. I adore you, Johnny—and whenever you come into my room at night, I'm delighted to see you—(*Looks at him.*)—will you be shocked if I am quite frank?

JOHNNY: I hope not!

NANCY: But your infrequent visits during the last six months suggest—(*pause*)—to make it easier for you, I'll include myself—(*pause*)—it hasn't the same thrill for either of us!

JOHNNY: Well, I don't see why I should be blamed—

NANCY: Who's blaming you?!

JOHNNY (*turns away*): I suppose it's the old story—marriage is the death of love?

NANCY: Nothing of the sort—habit is the death of romance!

JOHNNY (*rises—crosses right centre*): I suppose you understand that you have been telling me for the last ten minutes that at any moment I may be a cuckold!

NANCY: That's true—you may be!

JOHNNY (*angrily—turns to her*): You admit it?

NANCY: How can anyone ever tell what is waiting

for one round the corner of this life—but I hope not, because it would be such a bore—but if it should happen, I hope you like me enough to be as helpful to me, as I have been to you!

JOHNNY: What do you mean by that?

NANCY (*rises and crosses to piano*): Oh, I'm so sorry—I meant as I would be to you!

JOHNNY (*crosses to fireplace*): There's something very subtle about this mood of yours. What do you actually mean?

NANCY: Liz. (*She is looking at a magazine—her back to him.*)

JOHNNY (*starts*): What about Liz?

NANCY: You were unkind to her at dinner last night—she made a very insane observation, to which you said "Rubbish"!

JOHNNY: Well?

NANCY: No woman likes to give the impression of being stupid when she is first in love with a man!

JOHNNY: You're not telling me she's in love with me, are you?

NANCY (*drops magazine—turns to him*): Johnny, if you don't stop this hypocrisy, I shall get angry—Why can't you be friendly?

JOHNNY: I don't know what the hell you are talking about! (*Angrily.*) Say what you mean.

NANCY: Charles is looking for a co-respondent!

JOHNNY (*starts*): Charles is—if he is, what has that got to do with me?

NANCY (*sits at piano—starts playing*): I thought you might be interested!

JOHNNY: Will you stop playing that damn piano! (*She stops—looks at him.*) You're not seriously suggesting I have an eye to Liz—Charlie—my best friend's wife, are you?

NANCY: Does Charlie know that you and his wife occasionally dine together at a little obscure restaurant

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in Soho? You never told me. (*He makes a great endeavour to appear indifferent.*) I have always believed myself the value of dining at the Ritz is . . . the frankness of it leaves one's friends uncertain—but Soho—oh, God, that is so final!

JOHNNY (*crosses down centre, then left to end settee*): Who told you I dined with her in Soho?

NANCY: Is that important?

JOHNNY (*turns to her*): Shall I tell you why I dined with her in Soho?

NANCY (*looks at him*): Johnny, that's not your truthful face!

JOHNNY: Yes, it is! Because Charles is so infernally jealous he won't let her dine alone with anybody! (*Sits on settee.*)

NANCY (*rises and crosses right centre*): Knowing that, if you are not interested in her, why do you take such a risk of offending your best friend, Charlie?

JOHNNY: Sometimes one likes to dine with a woman alone, doesn't one?

NANCY: Of course—but as I'm not interested in Charlie, if Liz objected to me dining with him alone, I wouldn't—but if I were interested in him, I shouldn't give a damn! I just would—like you do.

JOHNNY: I'm not interested in her!

NANCY (*crossing up centre*): Johnny, you're hopeless—it's useless trying to be friendly!

JOHNNY: What do you mean?

NANCY (*coming back to down centre*): Please, darling, don't treat me as though I were an idiot. Do you think I can't see out of my eyes—you're infatuated by her—she's got you!

JOHNNY (*tries to laugh*): Well, of all the—

NANCY (*crossing right a bit*): That clinging, feminine, poor, misunderstood little ass has fixed you!

JOHNNY: I resent most bitterly—the—the—and let me tell you this—you've no right to talk about her

like that—she never says anything but nice things about you!

NANCY (*sadly*): Johnny! Please don't tell me she's put that old one over you!

JOHNNY: I think that jealous scenes——

NANCY (*crosses and sits next to him*): Jealous of her, Johnny? My sweet, in a year's time I'll be begging you to be even civil to her, she'll bore you so much!

JOHNNY: She's a very nice woman, and I shall always like her.

NANCY: Charles said that in the presence of a clergyman five years ago—now he's looking for a co-respondent! It would irritate me terribly if it were you who gave him peace and happiness!

JOHNNY: She'd damn well like to be free of him!

NANCY: Oh! She told you that?

JOHNNY (*hesitates*): I only gathered it in conversation! What is it you want me to do—never speak to her again?

NANCY: Do you really think I should be such a fool as to ask you that?

JOHNNY: Why not?

NANCY: One—at the moment I don't believe you would be able to—and, two, if you did, you'd hate me!

JOHNNY: What do you mean, I wouldn't be able to?!

NANCY: At the moment, she has too great a physical attraction for you, and—(*He laughs.*)—why do you laugh?

JOHNNY: It isn't unfunny, is it, to be accused of having no character! (*Pause.*) And, mind you, there isn't, but if there were anything between us, in the face of all you've said, why shouldn't there be?

NANCY: If she were anyone else, I shouldn't mind in the least!

JOHNNY: You wouldn't?!

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NANCY: I wouldn't have the right to, any more than you would have if I were in the same position!

JOHNNY: This is funny—I can do as I like, but it mustn't be Liz! Why don't you answer? (*She looks at him.*) Perhaps you think I'm so much in love with her I'd leave you and the children for her?

NANCY: That in the back of the mind of that cunning little bitch is her hope!

JOHNNY (*angrily*): The thought has never entered her mind!

NANCY: Has it never entered yours? (*He looks on the ground.*) Johnny, I have always made it a rule in life that whenever I can't think of a good lie, I always tell the truth!

JOHNNY: I suppose you're right! (*Rises; crosses right to centre.*) You won't make a scene or be angry?

NANCY: Darling!

JOHNNY: Very well! I like her most terribly! (*Raises his voice.*) And I can't help it! A thousand times I've tried to persuade myself of the weakness, the rottenness of it all, and a thousand times I've failed! She's got the most compelling power over me, I can't help wanting to see her, to be with her!

NANCY (*with sympathy*): I understand!

JOHNNY (*turns to her*): Frankly, if you hadn't been you, I'd have gone off with her months ago.

NANCY: Yes!

JOHNNY: But you are you—and each time I've been on the verge of telling you, my courage failed me, because I realize what a selfish bloody thing it would be to do. What would you have done if I'd told you I was going?

NANCY: Fight like hell to keep you!

JOHNNY (*laughs*): I didn't think anything could make me laugh!

NANCY: I am devoted to you, Johnny!

JOHNNY: How you can be, defeats me.

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NANCY: Oh, I've had my moments, but I realize nothing in this world can last—what's the old saying: half a loaf is better than no bread—and if you believe you've got the best half—(*Pauses.*)—well!

JOHNNY (*looks at her; pauses; crosses to her*): Anyway, now that I have been able to talk to you, I feel different about it all, it's made it much easier—and sorry as I am in many ways I'm glad—(*takes her hand.*) because in my heart I have always known that if ever it comes to a question of you or her or anyone else in this world—unless you tell me to get out—they cease to exist!

NANCY: I shall never tell you to get out!

JOHNNY (*pauses; crosses up centre; turns back*): I shan't see her again!

NANCY: You think she will agree to that!

JOHNNY (*crosses back to centre*): You don't think she will? You're prejudiced, she's an extremely nice woman!

NANCY: Then perhaps I'm wrong!

JOHNNY: There's no perhaps—you are wrong! And this is final—if she won't go away for a bit—I shall.

NANCY (*looks at him affectionately; puts out her hand*): Yes, Johnny!

JOHNNY (*takes her hand—then strokes her hair*): Tell me—what happens when wives catch their husbands dining surreptitiously with a girl in Soho?

NANCY: If the wife is intelligent—she buys her husband a present!

JOHNNY (*laughs—kisses her forehead*): I never thought of that!

[*Charles enters right; crosses to right centre.*]

CHARLES: Liz is coming down to lunch!

[*Johnny breaks up centre.*]

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NANCY: I'm so glad!

CHARLES: Are you going to hunt this season, Johnny?

JOHNNY: No—I've lost my nerve!

CHARLES: Oh, you'll get it back again, old boy!

JOHNNY: I might—but I'm not going to try to!
(*Crosses back down to centre.*)

CHARLES: I've got to go off tomorrow and look for a house—I've taken on the field master job of our hunt for a year!

NANCY: That ought to be fun!

CHARLES: Pity Liz doesn't hunt, isn't it? Do her so much good!

NANCY: I can sympathize with her not wanting to—there are many more pleasant ways of being sick than riding towards fences! I'll be with the children if you want me, Johnny! (*Exits left.*)

CHARLES: Johnny, old boy, there's an angel!

JOHNNY: You've no conception how right you are!

CHARLES (*crossing down left*): I don't mean it unkindly, but I wish Liz had a little of her character.

JOHNNY (*crossing up right, gets cigarette from table by chair*): In what way?

CHARLES: I'm going through a damn difficult time with her, Johnny.

JOHNNY: It's only temporary!

CHARLES: I sincerely hope so, because I couldn't stick it much longer. I can't do a damn thing that's right!

JOHNNY: She'll be all right directly!

CHARLES (*sits settee*): It's all very well for you to talk, you only see her in her good moods—I'm almost frightened to even open my mouth—and if I go into her room at night, she almost screams the blasted place down!

JOHNNY (*crossing right centre*): Well, I suppose after

you've been married five years you haven't got the same thrill for a woman that——

CHARLES (*indignantly*): Not at all! The fact of the matter is, Liz, like a lot of English women, has no temperament!

JOHNNY (*crossing left a few steps*): How do you know that?

CHARLES: Good God, haven't I been married to her for five years!

JOHNNY: But that doesn't prove she hasn't any temperament!

CHARLES (*angrily*): What do you mean?

JOHNNY: My dear old boy, if you'd like to see an Italian roll on the floor with laughter, tell him Englishwomen have no temperament!

CHARLES (*angrily*): Are you telling me it's me who is wrong?

JOHNNY: No—no—it's neither of your faults!

CHARLES: If I believed for a minute you were right, I'd give her her freedom tomorrow!

JOHNNY: That would be a damn silly thing to do, because in another two years' time you'd be in precisely the same position with another woman! (*Looks at him.*) That's made you think! Your trouble, old boy, is you're damned—selfish! (*Crosses right a bit.*)

CHARLES: I'd like to know what you mean by that?

JOHNNY: She hates hunting—does that stop you carting her down to the wilds of England for a whole winter?

CHARLES: Lots of her friends are there.

JOHNNY (*right to him*): And what do they talk about—hunting—hunting—hunting—bloody bores! (*Crosses up centre.*) I'm not surprised the woman's nerves are in such a state—if I were married to you, I wouldn't be nervous—I'd be insane!

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CHARLES: It's all very well—but—what do you suggest I could do?

JOHNNY (*crosses to Charles*): Take her away—take her round the world—do something she wants to do!

CHARLES: Later on, perhaps—but I've promised Willie Grey to take on the field master job this year.

JOHNNY: Oh, my God! Isn't your wife's health, your wife's happiness more important than Willie Grey? Tell Willie Grey to go to hell! Your trouble is, you're tickled to death because you're a field master—in the great position of being able to tell a lot of half-wits what they can do and what they can't!

CHARLES: Nothing of the sort! It's a sport that appeals to the most intelligent, the most courageous men in England!

JOHNNY: Well, the intelligent ones take damned good care they are not field masters! Your damned selfishness will ruin a lot of lives before you're finished! And if you ever find out that girl has been unfaithful to you, don't you ever come to me for sympathy! (*There is a pause. Charles appears to be thinking. Johnny looks at him.*)

CHARLES: I suppose there is something in what you say!

JOHNNY: I should think there was!

CHARLES: Perhaps I should take her away for a month!

JOHNNY: What's the use of a month? (*Crosses up centre.*)

CHARLES: It's unlikely she'd want to be away longer!

JOHNNY (*back down centre*): You keep her away as long as she wants to be.

CHARLES: The question is, will she come!

[*Liz Pleydell enters right from upstairs.*]

LIZ: Hullo!

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JOHNNY: Hullo, Liz, old girl, how are you? (*Crosses to her—both right centre.*)

LIZ: I'm better—and terribly ashamed of myself—I hope Nancy is not angry with me for making that appalling scene last night?

JOHNNY: Nancy couldn't be more sympathetic!

LIZ: I can't understand what happened to me!

CHARLES (*rises; crosses right a step*): Your nerves are in a bad way, darling, and——

LIZ (*crosses to settee—left of Charles*): That's the fifth time you've told me that today!

CHARLES: I wish you'd let me finish! I was going to say, I'm prepared to give up hunting for a bit and take you abroad!

LIZ (*looks at him—sits settee*): I don't know what you mean?

CHARLES: Johnny has been giving me an awful dressing down about my selfishness, and I'm bound to say he's right!

LIZ (*to Johnny*): You didn't suggest to Charles he should take me abroad?

JOHNNY (*right centre*): I did!

LIZ (*almost unable to speak*): You did?

CHARLES: And he's quite right—I realize now I've been awfully selfish—I have done all the things I've wanted to without proper consideration for you! (*She looks on the ground. He looks at Johnny and nods.*) You like the idea, I hope—you'd get some sun! (*She doesn't answer. Charles looks at Johnny, puzzled.*) Or if you prefer, we might go on a cruise? (*She doesn't answer.*) What do you think, Liz?

LIZ: I'm so surprised I can't think! (*Turns to Johnny.*) I suppose you want to go, and don't want to be alone, so you've persuaded Charlie that he and I go with you?

JOHNNY: No!

CHARLES: Why don't you do that, Johnny?

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JOHNNY (*shakes his head*): No! No! No! (*Crosses to fireplace.*)

CHARLES: Well, what do you think, Liz?

LIZ: I'm so overwhelmed, I can't think! At all events I'd have to think it over when I collect myself!

CHARLES: There's no hurry! (*Breaks up centre.*)

LIZ: Hugo was screaming for you, Charles—he's in the garden!

CHARLES (*crosses to windows*): Oh—I'll go and see him. Talk it over with Johnny, Liz! (*Exits centre.*)

LIZ (*angrily—rises*): Johnny, how could you, how dare you!

JOHNNY (*crossing centre*): We're caught!

LIZ: Cau— (*stops*) Who's caught us?

JOHNNY: Some swine has seen us dining together at that horrible little restaurant in Soho, and told Nancy!

LIZ (*crosses to him*): There's nothing in that!

JOHNNY (*crosses right a bit—then up centre*): True. But Nancy is intelligent enough to know that two married people don't hide themselves away in a filthy restaurant, eat that damned awful food to prove their fidelity!

LIZ: Did she accuse you of living with me?

JOHNNY (*crosses right centre*): Not in those words—she spoke more with a confident assumption!

LIZ: But you denied it?

JOHNNY: You can't deny something you're not accused of—she took it as a perfectly obvious result of two people dining at a revolting restaurant!

LIZ (*crossing a few steps left*): For my sake alone, you should never have allowed her to believe it! At the least you might have behaved like a gentleman!

JOHNNY: You can't behave like a gentleman with Nancy—she's much too clever!

LIZ (*angrily—speaks louder*): So because your wife accuses——

JOHNNY (*crosses to right end settee*): 'Sh! 'Sh! Keep your voice down—so far, only Nancy knows!

LIZ (*crossing up left and back down left*): I've got to go abroad with Charles for a month and be bored insane! Nothing will induce me to go!

JOHNNY: You needn't go if you don't want to! I'll go!

LIZ (*crosses to him*): Johnny, you mean this is over?

JOHNNY (*hesitates*): Well——

LIZ: Answer me!

JOHNNY: No one hates the idea more than I do!

LIZ: Is it over?

JOHNNY: Now that Nancy knows, it's so different. I've always been quite frank with you about her—I don't say our married life is completely satisfactory—but I'm devoted to her—she's been angelic to me—(*Pause.*)—and now that she knows, how can I go on hurting her feelings?

LIZ: So when you have told me how much you like me, what fun it is being together—(*looks at him*)—all untrue!

JOHNNY (*crosses right a few steps*): Don't be childish—I'm miserable! (*Pauses—crosses back to her—takes her arms.*) I'm damned if I know what I'm going to do without you!

LIZ: But we could make it impossible for anyone to know we met.

JOHNNY (*crossing away right centre*): Take a flat, I suppose, and find out the caretaker is my butler's brother! No—it's spoilt. The knowledge that it is known would make it impossible for it ever to be the same again!

LIZ: You want it to end?

JOHNNY (*crossing back to her*): Of course I don't but because Nancy is—well, Nancy, there's only one

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thing I can do. But if she were different—like lots of other women, I'd go off with you tomorrow!

LIZ (*she looks at him quickly—puts arms on his shoulders*): You would?

JOHNNY: You know that!

LIZ (*pause—crosses to left end settee—sits*): I see all your difficulties, Johnny. I'll help you.

JOHNNY: How?

LIZ: I'll go abroad at once!

JOHNNY (*crosses to her*): You want to go?

LIZ: It's useless trying to make me laugh! But I do realize, remembering what an angel Nancy is, now that she knows how impossible the position is for you, that the only way I can prove how much I really like you, is to help you—(*Pause—turns away.*) I hate it, but I'll go!

JOHNNY: That's noble of you, Liz. (*Pauses—sits by her.*) There is no other way, is there?

LIZ (*turns to him*): Not feeling as you do, Johnny!

JOHNNY: That's true! (*Pauses—touches her.*) I'm sorry I cursed that little restaurant—it wasn't so bad!

LIZ (*almost kissing him*): I adored it!

JOHNNY (*turns away*): It's a pity, but there it is! Where do you think you'll go?

LIZ: My father left me some interests in South Africa——

JOHNNY (*starts*): You can't go as far as South Africa?

LIZ: Why not—I've always wanted to go—I've often shown you the picture of the orange ranch I own there!

JOHNNY: But Charles would never go as far as South Africa!

LIZ: You don't think I'd take Charles, do you? (*Laughs.*) Really, my dear Johnny, you're losing your humour, surely! As soon as I get to South

Africa, I shall write and ask him to give me my freedom!

JOHNNY: But you can't go all that way alone!

LIZ: As you are not coming with me—why not?

JOHNNY: But it's so far!

LIZ: Not too far—if I stayed here, it would be difficult for both of us; I should always be longing to see you, to speak to you on the telephone—(*Leans towards him.*) I should be weak, and I hope you would be, too!

JOHNNY: I expect I'd have my telephone cut off, and then take a seat outside a call box!

LIZ (*smiles*): I'm glad! No—I belong to the whole hog school—the lot or nothing—and as it can't be the lot, there's only one way—we must finish it all completely!

JOHNNY: Yes! (*Pauses.*) We could dine together the night before you go?

LIZ: When it's over? Why hurt Nancy's feelings?

JOHNNY: Surely as we are only going at the moment to accidentally meet in the future, we——

LIZ: No, Johnny! Besides, it would be much too painful! I couldn't bear it. We don't meet any more!

JOHNNY: You're saying all this because you're angry!

LIZ (*shakes her head*): I'm saying it because I don't want to make myself more unhappy than I am already going to be! You must know how terribly miserable I am, surely! (*They are very close.*)

[*Reggie enters centre—crosses to centre.*]

REGGIE (*to Johnny*): There's been a frightful disaster in your garden, old boy! (*Johnny doesn't answer—crosses to fireplace.*) I'm sorry you're not interested!

JOHNNY: Sorry—what happened?

REGGIE: I took on that Russian feller double or

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quits for the money I lost to him at bezique last night, and he beat me at the last hoop!

JOHNNY: Well?

REGGIE: Well!? My dear feller, who would have expected a Russian to be able to play croquet?

LIZ (*laughs*): You've an awful lot to learn, Reggie!

REGGIE (*looks at her—crosses to right end settee*): At any rate, you appear to be better this morning!

LIZ (*with gaiety—crosses to centre*): I thank you!—I'm quite all right again!

[*Hugo and Archie appear outside windows.*]

If you don't mind, Johnny, I shall go up to London after lunch. (*She exits centre.*) Hello, Hugo!

HUGO: Oh, hello!

[*Reggie sits right on settee. Johnny sits down right. Hugo enters and crosses down centre to Reggie. Archie enters and sits in up right chair.*]

HUGO (*to Reggie*): You had bad luck, old boy, I was sure you'd win! Awkward for you, you can't very well owe a feller like that!

REGGIE: The question I ask is, if he had lost, could he have paid me?

HUGO: How could he pay a sum like that? (*Crosses up right and gets glass of port.*)

REGGIE: Archie, as one of the best shots in England, would you back yourself against that Russian at clay pigeons?

ARCHIE: Umm? I've seen him play golf, bridge, bezique, and croquet, but I have never seen him shoot—I wouldn't!

[*Dorothy enters centre and crosses to Reggie.*]

HUGO (*to Reggie*): Looks as though you'll have to pay, old boy!

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[*Lady Bletchley enters centre.*]

DOROTHY: What are you going to take the Russian on at now, Reggie? (*Crossing right—to Johnny, who rises and crosses to fireplace.*) What's the matter, Johnny? (*She sits down right.*)

JOHNNY: Matter? Nothing—why?

LADY BLETCHLEY (*crossing down centre*): Do we have lunch in this house on Sundays? (*Reggie rises.*)

JOHNNY: Half past one, Emily!

LADY BLETCHLEY: If I had known that, I would have had more breakfast! (*She crosses and sits on settee. Reggie sits beside her.*) That tiresome little woman seems to have recovered—being a very gay little person in that garden!

NANCY (*enters left*): Do you know it's twenty minutes to two? (*She sits on armchair down left.*)

[*Paul enters centre and crosses down centre.*]

Ring the bell, Johnny.

[*Johnny rings the bell.*]

PAUL (*to Reggie*): What bad luck you had! I'm ashamed of my good luck!

REGGIE: All right—all right! Don't make a scene about it! I hope it wouldn't have embarrassed you if you'd had to pay me! (*Crosses centre to Paul.*)

PAUL: I always expect to lose—(*takes out pocket-book and waves it in Reggie's face*)—so much so, I always come prepared to pay on the nail!

[*Charles enters up centre—crosses behind piano to Nancy down left.*]

CHARLES: Nancy, I hope you won't mind, but Liz wants to go up after lunch, as she is going abroad

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at once, she wants to buy her clothes! (*Nancy looks at him.*)

HUGO: Where is she going, old boy?

CHARLES: South Africa!

[*All are amazed and react.*]

HUGO: South Africa!!

REGGIE: Are you going with her?

CHARLES: I offered to, but she refused to let me—she thinks I'd hate it, and insists on my hunting.

[*Liz enters up centre. Morton enters right.*]

MORTON: Lunch is served, Your Grace. (*He exits right.*)

LADY BLETCHLEY: And not a minute too soon!

[*Lady Bletchley exits quickly down right. Johnny and Dorothy follow out right. Liz joins Paul.*]

LIZ (*as they cross down right*): You promise you will come and stay with us when I come back?

PAUL: I have promised—you are most kind.

[*They exit right. Hugo and Archie follow them out. Reggie is next.*]

REGGIE: I say, what sort of a place is South Africa?

[*Nancy follows Reggie.*]

CHARLES (*stopping her*): Nancy! (*Crossing to her.*) I'm worried. Awfully generous of Liz, but I think I ought to go with her.

NANCY: If she doesn't want you to, why?

CHARLES: I'd like to hunt, of course, but Johnny was so beastly about my selfishness that—

NANCY: Was Johnny responsible for all this?

CHARLES: He certainly was—he convinced me I

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ought to give up everything, and take her abroad for for a bit.

NANCY: How nice of Johnny!

CHARLES (*not looking at Nancy*): And he convinced Liz she ought to go!

NANCY (*pauses*): How clever of Liz! (*She pauses—looks at Charles.*) What on earth are we doing standing here?

[*She walks quickly to dining-room off right. Charles follows.*]

Curtain

ACT TWO

Scene: The same. A card table is placed right in front of the stool—an occasional chair is left of the table.

Time: Afternoon. One month later.

Reggie and Dorothy are playing cards at the table. Lady Bletchley is seated on settee, knitting.

DOROTHY (*playing*): I can't understand why Eric is so late!

LADY BLETCHLEY: He's been detained, I expect!

DOROTHY: Odd! I thought he would have been here ages ago.

LADY BLETCHLEY: He's been in the South of France during the last three weeks, hasn't he?

DOROTHY: Yes, he got back to London last night. He's motoring down—I hope nothing has happened to him! (*Lays down cards—laughing.*)

REGGIE (*rising from table; throwing down cards. Walking centre*): Distressing! I never win at any game! Thank heaven women like me!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Ho! The vulgar conceit of this creature!

DOROTHY (*laughs—crosses to below table*): Do tell us what type of women like you, Reggie?

REGGIE (*holds his tie, speaking pompously*): Rather a stupid question, Dorothy! What?

LADY BLETCHLEY: I'm a poor woman, but I'm prepared to bet you fifty pounds you've never been to bed with a woman you know.

REGGIE: Unhappily for me, but fortunately for you, Emily, I am a gentleman!

[*Molly enters right. She is wearing a hat, and carrying a purse, and her clothing shows she has just arrived.*]

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MOLLY (*to all*): Hullo!

DOROTHY: Hullo, Molly!!

[*Molly and Reggie greet each other centre.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY: Molly, darling, where have you come from?

MOLLY (*sitting beside Lady Bletchley*): I've been staying with Anne Stepley in the North! I'm going with Anne's party to South America next month. (*Looking interestedly at Dorothy.*) You know about Angela Stepley?

DOROTHY: No—what about her? (*Sits on arm of chair down right.*)

MOLLY (*tries to appear indifferent*): Oh, nothing really—I'll tell you later!

REGGIE: Isn't Hugo coming for the week-end?

MOLLY: Hugo telephoned me last night to say he didn't feel well, and was going to see his doctor.

REGGIE: Sorry!

MOLLY: Hugo drinks too much.

REGGIE: Oh, no!!

MOLLY: Who's here?

DOROTHY: Charlie and Liz—

MOLLY (*laughs*): Of course! Liz leaves for South Africa tomorrow!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Thank God!

MOLLY (*laughs*): Why, Emily?

REGGIE: I think we ought to warn you the atmosphere in this house is a little strained!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*firmly*): I'll have no discussion of this most unhappy business!

MOLLY: Sweet one, if it is anything about Liz and Johnny, that's stale stuff—I've known about it for months!

LADY BLETCHLEY: I very nearly smacked Johnny's face at lunch today, I know that.

ACT TWO

MOLLY: Why?

LADY BLETCHLEY: He—(*points to Reggie*)—told a most unnecessary story, and when he had finished, Nancy told him she wouldn't have stories of that kind told in her house; when to everybody's amazement, Johnny lost his temper and told her that it was his house, and Reggie could tell what stories he liked!

MOLLY: Was there a scene?

LADY BLETCHLEY: No. I'm bound to say I've never seen anybody behave as well as Nancy did—if she hadn't heard it she couldn't have been more indifferent!

DOROTHY: Are you sure she did hear?

REGGIE: Of course she heard it! Personally, I thought Johnny was right—carrying prudishness a little too far, I thought!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Do you! Well, let me tell you your nasty dirty story without a point of any sort or kind in it, nearly made me sick!

REGGIE: You never had a grain of humour, Emily! (*Crosses up centre—then behind piano to down left.*)

MOLLY (*laughs*): What did Liz do?

DOROTHY (*laughs*): Oh, looked simple, and so feminine!

LADY BLETCHLEY: I could have smacked her.

DOROTHY: Unless a miracle happens, my view is Nancy's going to lose her Johnny!

[*Eric enters right.*]

ERIC: Hullo! How are you all?

ALL: Hullo, Eric! (*Reggie sits down left.*)

DOROTHY: Eric, you do look well! (*They shake hands.*)

ERIC (*crossing to right of Molly*): Do I? Well, I ought to—the weather was lovely—lots of sun all the time! How are you, Molly! Well?

[*Dorothy follows him centre.*]

MOLLY: Frightfully well! (*Looks at him; speaks with great significance.*) Eric, I've been staying with Anne Stepley!

ERIC (*turns to her; shakes his head significantly at her*): Have you?

DOROTHY: Let's go outside, Eric. I want to hear all the news! (*Takes his arm.*)

ERIC: Yes—let's. (*As they walk out.*) Archie is here, I hope? I've got a story to tell him that will make him laugh!

[*Eric and Dorothy exit centre.*]

MOLLY: He's got a story to tell Dorothy that won't make her laugh!

LADY BLETCHLEY: What do you mean?

MOLLY: Eric is engaged to be married to Angela Stepley!

REGGIE (*delighted*): I say, that's interesting—and the poor feller has to break it to Dorothy. This ought to be a magnificent week-end! And I very nearly didn't come!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Pity!

REGGIE: What's a pity?

[*Lady Bletchley looks at Reggie. Nancy enters centre and crosses to Molly. Reggie rises.*]

NANCY: Molly dear, I am glad to see you!

MOLLY: Darling, how are you? (*Rises; to Nancy.*)

NANCY: Awfully well. Hugo isn't coming until late, I hear!

MOLLY: No—he's gone to see his doctor!

NANCY: I know—I'm sorry!

MOLLY: I'm black—can I go up to my room? (*Starts right.*)

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NANCY: Please—it's the same room as you were in last time you were here! Cocktails are outside!

MOLLY: Thank you so much! I won't be long!

[*Molly exits right to upstairs. Nancy sits on stool right—toys with playing cards.*]

REGGIE (*speaks slowly and pompously—crossing to left of card table*): Nancy, I apologize for telling that story at lunch. I didn't realize you'd think it vulgar.

NANCY (*indifferently*): I minded its vulgarity much less than its age!

REGGIE: Well, I don't see that one can do more than say one is sorry! (*Walks slowly towards the window's centre.*)

NANCY: Reggie! (*He stops—returns to table.*) Did your father or mother ever beat you when you were a little boy?

REGGIE: May I ask why such a peculiar question?

NANCY: It's not a catch! I only want to know!

REGGIE: No, I was never beaten!

NANCY: Thank you so much.

[*Reggie looks perplexed, pauses, looks at Lady Bletchley, then back at Nancy, turns, walks out.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY: Why did you ask him that question?

NANCY: Nothing!

LADY BLETCHLEY: How I detest that man!

NANCY: Well, you may never see him in this house again, Emily, dear!

LADY BLETCHLEY: I'm glad to hear it!

NANCY: There are a great many people you may never see here again! (*Pauses; looks at her.*) I might even include myself in that number.

LADY BLETCHLEY: I have never heard such nonsense!

NANCY: How are they betting, Emily?

LADY BLETCHLEY: What do you mean?

NANCY: Darling, do stop being so coy. Johnny has made it so apparent to everybody, it's only natural, they are all thrilled to death!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Johnny's behaviour at lunch was so unlike him—no one knows what to think!

NANCY (*nods her head*): Amazing, wasn't it?

LADY BLETCHLEY: So you did notice it?

NANCY: It would have been difficult not to, wouldn't it? (*She rises.*) He's been horrid to me during the last month, but never publicly until today! (*Pause—crosses to right end settee.*) Curious that a stupid little thing like Liz can change a man so entirely!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Well, I'm glad that horrid little woman is going away tomorrow!

NANCY (*looks first at doors—then sits beside Lady Bletchley—speaks in a low voice*): Johnny is going with her!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*starts*): I don't believe it! (*Nancy nods.*) He's told you. (*Nancy shakes her head.*) Then how do you know?

NANCY: Unknown to them, after lunch I was sitting on the porch outside his sitting room, and I was able to hear every word they said! (*Pause.*) Have you ever eavesdropped, Emily?

LADY BLETCHLEY: I once steamed one of Edward's letters open!

NANCY (*laughs*): Eavesdropping is much more exciting! You would be amazed to know how little you know about yourself—here have I been going through life under the impression I was a gay, jolly little soul—whereas I'm exactly the opposite. Did you know I was so damned superior that my prudishness made people sick?

LADY BLETCHLEY: Certainly not!

NANCY: Did you know I wore the clothes and had the mind of a pompous school-mistress?

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LADY BLETCHLEY: Nothing of the sort!

NANCY: Liz says I have! How that got me! If it hadn't been that I wanted to hear the rest of their conversation I'd have leapt through the window and smacked her stupid little face.

LADY BLETCHLEY: You don't seriously tell me that idiot is going to run away with her?

NANCY: He did everything he could to persuade her to stay here, but she loves him so much for both their sakes she must go!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*disgusted*): Oh! The little beast, knowing he'd follow her!

NANCY: Of course! But it was all very beautiful—Johnny then decided life without her would be impossible—and life with me could never be the same again—he realizes now that although he has always been very fond of me, he never loved me—Liz is the first love, and the last love of his life! I never believed it possible two grown-up people could ever talk such utter damn nonsense!

LADY BLETCHLEY: But when he tells you—you'll——

NANCY: He's not going to tell me! Liz has decided that with his sensitive nature it would be too painful for him—and it would be better to just go—and write! Clever little thing, isn't she—takes no chances!

LADY BLETCHLEY: But aren't you furious with Johnny?

NANCY: How can you be furious with someone who is temporarily pathological!

LADY BLETCHLEY: He ought to be whipped!

NANCY: That's nonsense! Much more clever men than Johnny have sacrificed everything for the woman they love—it's a most compelling business while it lasts. I hope it never happens to me!

LADY BLETCHLEY: But aren't you going to tell him you know?

NANCY: I'm not going to tell him I listened to their

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conversation—but I'm going to provoke him so much, make him so angry, he'll lose his temper and tell me!

LADY BLETCHLEY: And then?

NANCY: I'll be in a position to have a few words with that little sweet!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*delighted*): Of course—splendid!

NANCY: It's not as easy as that—if she is really in love with him, nothing I can do will stop them!

LADY BLETCHLEY: You'll give her hell, I hope?

NANCY: I've thought of some awfully good things to say to her—I do hope I won't forget any of them! But I'm afraid it won't be much good!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Would you mind his going very much?

NANCY: I've never minded anything so much in all my life!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*shakes her head*): I couldn't be more sorry for you!

NANCY: And we really were so happy until this little beast came into our lives. I know all Johnny's weaknesses, and for a little I was most unhappy, but he was so divine to me in every other way, after a while I realized it's great conceit on the part of any man or woman to suppose they are so attractive they can hold people forever; so I accept it! But a mild, well-conducted affair I would have closed my eyes to; but because she is unhappy in her own life, to smash up mine is something I hate her for!

LADY BLETCHLEY: The more I see of our set, the more dreadful I realize they are!

NANCY: Our set is just the same as any other set—but with more opportunity!

LADY BLETCHLEY: I suppose so! Nancy, why on earth did you ask her here?

NANCY: She did her best not to come—but as they

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were going to meet somewhere, surely this is the place?

LADY BLETCHLEY: I'm just a fool! Is she with Johnny at this moment?

NANCY (*laughs*): She's playing golf with Paul. (*Laughs.*) Johnny's so miserable! There's no trick that little——

[*Johnny enters right; crosses down to right centre. Nancy stops talking.*]

JOHNNY (*sarcastically*): I'm sorry!

NANCY: Why?

JOHNNY: Obviously, I have interrupted some conversation you were having!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*rises and crosses to Johnny*): Not at all. I was asking Nancy at that moment if she would give me some cuttings from her rock garden!

JOHNNY (*sarcastically*): Is she going to?

NANCY: Of course!

LADY BLETCHLEY: And let me tell you something else! I have known you both so long that if she hadn't given them to me, I'd have taken them! So there! (*Exits right.*)

NANCY: You shouldn't be rude to Emily, Johnny; she's been a very good friend to us!

JOHNNY: Old gossip—always meddling in other people's affairs!

NANCY: Odd—I didn't know that about her!

JOHNNY (*raises his voice*): She was having a nice talk about me, and you know she was!

NANCY: What are you getting so angry for? Besides, what is there about you to talk about—you've practically told everybody you've had an affair with Liz—and they all know she is going to South Africa tomorrow—(*Pause.*) Is there anything else you would like to talk to me about that I don't know? (*There is*

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a pause. He doesn't look at her—he pauses—turns—starts to go up centre.) Don't go. I've got something rather distressing to tell you!

JOHNNY (*anxiously—crosses back to her, centre*): What?

NANCY: Your six-year-old son, half an hour ago, threw a pair of scissors at his sister and missed her by a mere inch!

JOHNNY: Why did he?

NANCY: Apparently he was being a little pompous, and to put him in his place she told him that by the time he was grown up there would be no such things as Dukes!

JOHNNY: Who has been putting ideas like that in her head?

NANCY: I gather one of the nurses holds very definite views about the future! (*Rises.*) In the meantime I have told the conceited little boy you are going to beat him!

JOHNNY (*crosses right*): Well, you're wrong—I'm not going to!

NANCY: Why not? He deserves it, surely?

JOHNNY: I don't believe in beating little boys—besides, he was provoked!

NANCY (*crosses to right end settee*): As no one should know better than you that women are going to provoke him all his life, surely this is a marvellous opportunity to stop scissor-throwing!

JOHNNY: I'm not going to have him beaten! I never was!

NANCY (*looks at him; speaking deliberately*): Can you have a better reason for beating him?

JOHNNY (*angrily—crosses to her*): What the hell do you mean by that?

NANCY: Johnny, your rudeness shocks me—the change in you is unbelievable—you behave like a man defending himself against something he's ashamed of—you're someone I don't know.

ACT TWO

JOHNNY (*controlling himself with difficulty*): Am I? Well—he's not going to be beaten!

NANCY: He's going to be—(*They look at each other.*) or do you want him to grow up a spoilt little man like you are? Surely you'd like him when he is your age to have some semblance of self-control.

JOHNNY: I see—this is all an excuse to tell me what you think of me?

NANCY: Johnny, dear, you don't count! You exist only on the glory of your ancestors; but I should hate him to accept all the prerequisites that come from his position, and give nothing back in return—

JOHNNY: Like me?

NANCY: Why bring yourself into it? I am not blaming you. I blame your parents for bringing you up so badly! You never had a chance; it wasn't your fault you weren't beaten!

JOHNNY (*angrily*): Has anyone ever told you you ought to have been a school-mistress?

NANCY (*pauses; looks at him*): No. (*Pauses; looks at him.*) Has anyone ever told you I ought to have been one?

JOHNNY (*crosses down right*): No. But I have no doubt they think it!

NANCY: As long as your friends don't like me too much I really don't mind what they think of me!

JOHNNY (*crosses to her*): You've made that very evident to them! I suppose you'd like to fill the house with some of your dull clever friends!

NANCY: That's not fair—I have never once embarrassed you by asking a clever person into the house. (*Pause.*) And if they were really clever they wouldn't come!

JOHNNY (*crosses down right*): God!—Your self-satisfied attitude makes me boil! (*Angrily—turns to her.*) You've always had a contempt for me!

NANCY (*sits on arm of settee*): How can you say such a

thing? I've always loved you very much—and for some reason I find it impossible to explain I still do! (*Smiles at him.*) Odd, isn't it?

JOHNNY (*angrily—crosses to her*): You're sneering at me now—so you're so damn superior you despise me—you despise my friends—

NANCY: Who told you that?

JOHNNY (*crosses up centre*): Everybody knows it!

NANCY: Come, Johnny—Liz isn't everybody!

JOHNNY (*crosses back to her*): Ah! I've known all the time what you've been getting at! I knew it was Liz we were coming to!

NANCY: Don't be silly—that ridiculous little creature? (*Laughs—crosses and sits settee—takes cigarette.*) I'll tell you something very amusing about her—all the people staying with us think you might go off with her tomorrow! Aren't people too absurd?

JOHNNY: And how do you know I won't?

NANCY: Darling, I may not have a very high opinion of your intelligence, but I refuse to believe you are fit for an asylum!

JOHNNY (*with almost uncontrollable rage—crosses down right*): I would be if I stayed with you very much longer!

NANCY: Then you ought to go, Johnny!

JOHNNY (*blurts it out—turning to her*): I am going!

NANCY (*pauses*): With Liz to South Africa tomorrow? (*He doesn't answer.*) Answer me!

JOHNNY (*pauses: he is obviously sorry he has told her*): Yes!

NANCY: But you weren't going without telling me?

JOHNNY: I was—if you hadn't made me so damned angry I wouldn't have told you—(*Pauses—speaks almost hysterically—crosses to chair left of card table.*) I know from every point of view what a frightful thing I'm doing, and no one could have tried harder

ACT TWO

than I have to forget her—but I can't—I just know that I can't live without her!

NANCY: I understand!

JOHNNY (*sits chair*): God—I am a coward—I hate this!

NANCY (*rises; crosses to above his chair*): Don't be silly; you're quite right to go, feeling like you do, what possible life would there be for us?

JOHNNY: I imagine my behaviour during the last months makes it quite easy to part with me?

NANCY (*smiles at him—crosses above table to its right*): You've been, shall we say, a little unfriendly!

JOHNNY: I've been horrible, awful! But I've been so damned ashamed of myself—(*Pauses.*) But it's no use going on, I'm so much in love with her, I can't help myself!

NANCY: Has she told Charles? (*Sits on stool right of table.*)

JOHNNY: No—she's going to write to him!

NANCY: But suppose he refuses to divorce her?

JOHNNY: I don't care a damn what he does! I know you hate Liz and I don't suppose you'll believe me, but no one has fought harder than she has to prevent this!

NANCY: I knew when she decided to go so far away as South Africa what a fight she was putting up!

JOHNNY: It's a stupid thing to say, perhaps, but during the whole business she's shown herself to be a woman of fine character!

NANCY: One of the most elementary things about women of fine character is they don't smash up homes, Johnny!

JOHNNY: She has done everything she can not to; it's certainly my fault! (*Nancy laughs.*) Why do you laugh?

NANCY: Because you're such a damned half-wit, darling. It had nothing to do with you at all! If

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Liz had wanted to stop it, she could have, at any second she liked!

JOHNNY (*rises and crosses to below settee*): Then there's nothing more to say, is there?

NANCY: You're quite sure Liz will go to South Africa tomorrow?

JOHNNY (*surprised*): Well, of course—her tickets have been bought—her trunks have gone—she——

NANCY: If she didn't go tomorrow, would you be satisfied everything I have ever said about her is true?

JOHNNY: I certainly would be! Oh, I see! (*Walks to her—a step right.*) You mean you're going to make a scene and try and stop her?

NANCY: Scene? Stop her! I would never speak to her again if she didn't take you!

JOHNNY: Then what do you mean?

NANCY (*rises and crosses to below table*): Do you know, I have a feeling that at the last moment her courage will fail her, she'll decide she doesn't love you enough to take such a risk!

JOHNNY: I'm sorry, Nancy, but you are wrong!

NANCY (*crosses to fireplace*): I expect I am!

[*Paul enters centre; crosses to above chair left of table.*]

PAUL: I have had what Lord Rayne calls a disaster!

NANCY: How?

PAUL: I play golf with Charles—I give him six strokes, he beat me! I give Liz a stroke a hole, she beat me worse!

JOHNNY: Where is she now?

PAUL: She and Charles drive off in a car to say good-bye to some friends who live near here! (*Johnny walks out centre.*) Nancy, I tell you something—if I ever marry and my wife is going to South Africa tomorrow and I play golf as well as Charlie did, I'd be very suspicious about myself!

ACT TWO

NANCY (*toying with cards*): Awful for him if she misses the boat—wouldn't it?

PAUL: I believe he'd shoot himself! Your friend, Eric, he drinks a lot?

NANCY: Eric—good heavens no!

PAUL: Ah—I'm wrong! But perhaps he is troubled and cocktails make him feel good! (*Looks at her.*) May I respectfully say you look very lovely this afternoon?

NANCY: I'm told I look like a school-mistress!

PAUL: I wish you were a school-mistress!

NANCY: Why?

PAUL (*crosses to above table*): I'd join the school at once! I'd like to spend from nine every morning until four every afternoon with you! (*She laughs. He leans on table.*) I'd be very naughty sometimes and have to stay when all the others had gone!

NANCY: Might be amusing! (*Crosses to below settee.*)

PAUL: No—no! (*Shakes his head—follows to down right centre.*) Ha! I gave you up a long time ago. Pity—because you're the most attractive and the most charming woman I have ever known! (*Pauses.*) I've been wanting to tell you that for a long time!

NANCY: You couldn't have picked a better moment. (*Looks at him.*) You knew that, perhaps?

[*Eric enters centre. His manner is strange and different.*]

ERIC (*crossing to her*): Nancy, how are you?

NANCY (*shaking hands with him*): Eric, I am glad to see you. Enjoy the South of France?

[*Paul drifts up right centre.*]

ERIC: Very much, it was great fun! (*In a worried manner.*) I'm sorry, Nancy, but I may have to go back to London!

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NANCY: But why, you've just arrived!

ERIC: I ought not to have, but I wanted to see you!
But it's almost certain I will be telephoned for!

NANCY: Oh, I am sorry! But don't go back until
after dinner!

[*Footman enters with tray of cocktails centre—leaves them
on table right.*]

FOOTMAN (*to Nancy*): I've brought the cocktails in
here, Your Grace, because it's beginning to rain!

NANCY: Oh, thank you!

[*Footman exits centre. Paul walks to cocktail tray.*]

Well, I do hope you won't have to go, Eric! (*Starts
out down left.*)

ERIC: I'm afraid I'll have to, Nancy, but I'll come and
find you to say goodbye!

NANCY: Please do! (*Nancy exits left.*)

PAUL: Will I bring you a cocktail?

ERIC (*sits settee*): Please!

PAUL (*brings Eric a cocktail, lifts his glass to Eric*):
My congratulations!

ERIC (*starts toast—then*): What do you mean?

PAUL: Since I saw you last, I have a job in the City,
and when I left the office this afternoon, Arthur
Stepley told me he had just heard you were engaged
to his sister!

ERIC (*looks at left door*): Steady! Steady!

PAUL: It is not true?

ERIC: Yes, it's true, but I've come down here to
break the news to some old friends—you know what
old friends are, they——

PAUL: Oh, come—Dorothy is a very sensible woman.

ERIC (*is about to drink—then—indignantly*): I beg your
pardon!

ACT TWO

PAUL: Oh, please—we are men of the world!

ERIC: I suppose so! I knew it wasn't going to be easy—but if I had had any idea how difficult it was going to be, I wouldn't have come! (*Gives him glass.*) So get me another of those damn things, will you?

PAUL: Pleasure. (*Walks to cocktail table.*)

ERIC: Being a Russian, you may not know it, but one of the most characteristic things about Englishmen is they hate hurting women's feelings!

PAUL (*crosses back down centre*): Japanese just the same! (*Brings cocktail to him.*) It's not so much the hurting of their feelings we mind, it's the blasted scenes they make we are frightened of!

ERIC: I suppose there's something in that. (*Pause—drinks.*) I'm getting awfully tight, I know that!

[*Pause. Paul crosses and sits chair left of table.*]

Tell me, what did a Russian do when he had to tell a lady he had unfortunately fallen in love with someone else?

PAUL: The Russians were very romantic, very kind—they used to take a whip and go and give her a good beating to let her know for certain it was over!

ERIC: That's a pretty cruel—(*Angrily—rises.*) Are you laughing at me?

PAUL: Of course! Why go to London? (*Crosses to him.*) Go into her room before dinner and tell her the truth—(*Eric reacts mournfully.*) She'll cry a little in her bath—and come down to dinner as jolly as a sandboy! Hah! I love women—they are so terribly philosophical! (*Crosses back right to table.*)

ERIC: I beg your pardon—she will be very upset!

PAUL: Only if she is told by someone else—but if she hears it from you, she will be able to tell everybody it was her idea—she fixed it—it was time you were married. On account of the next man she meets,

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surely a woman is entitled to prove it was she who was bored with the last!

ERIC: Dorothy's affection for me is much more poignant than that—I believe she will be terribly upset.

PAUL (*snaps fingers*): How much will you bet?

ERIC (*starts to bet—catches himself*): It's not the sort of thing I'm prepared to bet about!

PAUL: I beg your pardon—I keep forgetting I'm in England!

[*Dorothy enters centre. Eric rises. Paul crosses to fireplace.*]

DOROTHY (*crossing to Eric*): Eric—what's the matter with you this afternoon? Your behaviour is most extraordinary—you said you'd be back in a minute, and that's a quarter of an hour ago!

PAUL: It was my fault—I kept him talking!

DOROTHY: But I don't understand you—you've hardly spoken a word to me since you arrived!

ERIC: That's pure imagination. Go up to dress early, and I'll come into your room and talk to you before dinner.

[*Paul crosses above table to above chair left of table.*]

DOROTHY: I hope so indeed! And what are you drinking so many cocktails for?

ERIC: I just feel in the mood!

DOROTHY (*in a most irritating manner—crosses and sits down right*): I should like you to know I find it most unattractive!

[*Eric makes move towards Dorothy.*]

PAUL (*to Eric; in a whisper*): Ssh!—Keep calm!

[*Molly enters centre. Eric crosses to left end piano.*]

ACT TWO

MOLLY (*to Paul—taking his arm*): You've had your last invitation here, my friend!

PAUL: What have I done?

MOLLY: It's an old English custom never to take a lady to play golf from those who love her on the eve of her departure!

PAUL: But I did not ask her to play golf!

MOLLY (*crosses and sits right arm settee*): Oh, God! What I wouldn't give to have a man as much in love with me as Johnny is with Liz! (*To Paul.*) I had hopes about you once! What's wrong with me? Did I throw myself too violently at you?

PAUL (*surprised*): Did you throw yourself at me?

MOLLY: The only thing I didn't offer you was money! (*Smiles at him and holds out hand.*) What was wrong with me?

PAUL (*crosses and takes her hand*): I have always made it a rule never to have a serious flirtation with anyone I really like.

MOLLY: Why?

PAUL: It's the only way of knowing them all one's life! (*Kisses her hand.*)

MOLLY: Dorothy, there's no doubt these foreigners have got our lot whacked! (*Crosses and sits left on settee.*)

[*Liz enters centre, followed by Charles. Paul crosses right centre.*]

LIZ (*crossing and sitting right on settee*): I have just been to say goodbye to the Sandleys—they sent you their love, Molly!

MOLLY: Oh, thank you!

ERIC: I hear you played well today!

CHARLES (*right of card table*): I played damned well! (*Points to Paul.*) I beat that feller!

MOLLY: Aren't you miserable at losing your little one tomorrow, Charles?

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CHARLES: I am indeed! But she insists on going, and there you are, what can one do! (*Sits stool right of table.*)

LIZ: Will someone give me a cocktail?

[*Dorothy rises and crosses to down right.*]

PAUL: I will! (*Goes to table up right.*)

DOROTHY: What's the name of your boat, Liz?

LIZ: Something Castle—I've forgotten!

[*Dorothy exits right to upstairs.*]

MOLLY: Anyone you know on board?

LIZ: I hope not. (*Takes cocktail from Paul; smiles at him.*) Thank you so much! I hope some of you will come and stay with me! (*Paul goes back to cocktail tray.*)

ERIC: Are you going for long, then?

LIZ: It's too far to go for a week-end, isn't it?

[*Lady Bletchley enters right.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY: Bah! Inflaming your stomach with those beastly things! (*Pause.*) Give me one!

[*Paul gives Lady Bletchley a cocktail. She sits down right. Reggie enters centre.*]

REGGIE (*crossing to centre*): I say, Liz, I've been thinking! I wouldn't be at all surprised if you saw me in South Africa one morning!

[*Eric exits centre.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY: There ends one part of our glorious Empire!

REGGIE (*indignantly—crossing to chair left of table*):

ACT TWO

Indeed! You may not know it, but I get on awfully well with South Africans!

[*Morton enters right.*]

MORTON: Lord Whitehall!

[*Hugo enters right, miserable and depressed. Morton exits.*]

HUGO: How are you all? Sorry I'm late. (*Crosses to centre.*)

MOLLY (*anxiously—crosses centre to him*):

Hugo, what is the matter?

LADY BLETCHLEY: Hugo, darling, what's the matter with you?

[*Charles rises anxiously. Paul is standing above card table.*]

REGGIE: Old boy!

HUGO: Cirrhosis of the liver!

MOLLY: Hugo, darling!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Poor darling!

CHARLES: Poor old boy!

REGGIE (*takes chair from left of table—places it centre—forces Hugo to sit.*) I say, old boy, I'm sorry!

HUGO: You're all very kind! I must never eat meat—very little bread—and—I must never touch another drop of drink!

REGGIE: Come, old boy, it can't be as bad as that!

HUGO: I've got to go to Vichy for two months and drink and drink and drink water!—I who have always loathed water!

LADY BLETCHLEY: What actually is cirrhosis of the liver?

REGGIE: A tribute nature pays to men who have completely conquered Teetotalism!

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HUGO: That's more or less what the doctor said! (*To Molly.*) But don't you worry, old girl. I know you've fixed to go on a cruise. I'll be perfectly all right. (*Rises.*)

MOLLY (*takes his arm*): I wouldn't dream of letting you go alone—don't be ridiculous!

REGGIE: I'll come with you for a month, Hugo.

[*Johnny enters centre—crosses to left end piano.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY: God's creatures never cease surprising me!

MOLLY (*crossing down right with Hugo*): Come on, darling, tell me all the doctor said.

[*Reggie replaces chair.*]

HUGO: Well, I think he's a damn fool—(*They are disappearing up the stairs.*)

[*Nancy enters left.*]

NANCY (*crosses to settee—to Liz*): I've been telling the gardener to pick some flowers and have them sent to the boat to you tomorrow!

LIZ: Oh, please—you shouldn't have bothered!

[*Johnny crosses up to cocktails up right.*]

NANCY: Nonsense—on a ship, alone, flowers are most necessary! (*To Charles.*) You'll miss her, Charles!

CHARLES: I must say I wish she wasn't going so far away!

NANCY (*sitting left in settee*): I'm told South Africa is quite lovely this time of year. Johnny, dear, give me a cocktail.

ACT TWO

REGGIE (*crossing to centre*): I wonder if you would tell me why you asked me if I had ever been beaten?

NANCY: I wished to justify something I did a few minutes ago, that is all! (*To Johnny, who has crossed to her left with cocktail.*) Oh, thank you so much!

[*Johnny crosses behind piano to centre. Reggie crosses to Lady Bletchley.*]

REGGIE: It may be of little interest to you—but I'm about to have a bath. (*Exits right upstairs.*)

[*Morton enters left.*]

MORTON: What time would you like dinner, please?

NANCY: Oh! What time is it now?

MORTON: Ten minutes past eight.

NANCY: Nine o'clock, then.

[*Morton exits left.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY (*rising and crossing out right to upstairs*): Dear, dear, I didn't know it was so late!

[*Johnny follows out right and upstairs.*]

CHARLES (*rising and exiting to upstairs*): I didn't either. Come on, Liz!

PAUL: I'll come with you.

LIZ (*risks and joins him*): You had bad luck this afternoon!

PAUL: I shall come to South Africa and play you double or quits at that golf game!

[*Charles, Liz and Paul exit right—upstairs. Nancy is left alone. She rises and replaces her cocktail glass up right on tray. Then crosses to front of fireplace right. There is a pause. Liz re-enters quickly. Crosses to telephone on desk left—sees Nancy—starts—looks at her nervously.*]

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LIZ: A footman told me my mother wanted me on the telephone!

NANCY: An invention of mine!

LIZ: Why—(*looks at her—puts down phone*)—what for?

NANCY: I wanted to have a few words with you—(*pause—sits on stool right of table*)—say goodbye privately!

LIZ (*a step right*): Goodbye—I——

NANCY: Johnny tells me he is leaving with you tomorrow!

LIZ (*starts—is obviously in a terribly nervous state*): Oh!

NANCY: Don't tell me you are angry with him for telling me? I would have thought you would have been grateful for an opportunity of defending yourself!

LIZ (*crosses to centre*): Nancy, I'm awfully sorry I——

NANCY: Forgive me! Johnny has made it so clear that he loves you so much it would be a waste of time attempting to stop him—but it will relieve you to know I have no intention of trying to!

LIZ: I wish I could tell you how sorry I am about it all, I——

NANCY: I'm sure you are! And after all, I'm old enough to know these things happen and can't be helped! But why South Africa—why so far away?

LIZ: I have an orange plantation there, and——

NANCY: Quite! But Johnny hates being out of England—I can't understand why you don't both stay here!

LIZ (*quickly*): In this house?

NANCY: Why not?

LIZ: But, where would you go?

NANCY (*pretends not to understand*): I? I'd stay here, of course!

LIZ: But that would be——

NANCY: I would have a bell put in each of your rooms,

ACT TWO

and when you wanted each other, you would just have to ring.

LIZ (*angrily*): If you mean to insult me, let me tell you I——

NANCY: Insult you—but this is incredible! You didn't mind living with Johnny when I didn't know, and now that I do and am being most agreeable about it, you're insulted! (*Looks at her.*) You're being a little old-fashioned, aren't you?

LIZ: I forgive your beastliness, because I know how you feel—but you must believe me, we've done everything we can to prevent this happening—but it's no use—we realize there is no happiness in life for either of us without each other!

NANCY: I find that most touching! So perhaps South Africa would be best! The winter is coming on, he doesn't hunt or do anything, so perhaps it would be better for him to sit in the sun picking oranges with you than going from club to club getting into more trouble! I hope you are taking that very excellent cook of yours with you?

LIZ: Why?

NANCY: Well, when your attraction for him begins—shall we say—to become normal, you'll be amazed how quickly his mind will turn to food!

LIZ: You can say what you like—perhaps you don't understand Johnny?

NANCY: Another tip—he hates bromides!

LIZ (*a step right*): May I go—or is there anything else you want to say?

NANCY: How long are you staying on the orange plantation in South Africa?

LIZ: We are not going to embarrass anybody by coming back before it is all over!

NANCY (*pretends not to understand*): All over? What's all over? I don't understand!

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LIZ: Obviously Charles will divorce me, and I assume you will divorce Johnny!

NANCY: I divorce Johnny? (*Chuckles—puts on glasses.*) Don't be ridiculous, Liz!

LIZ (*starts*): You mean you won't divorce him?

NANCY: Good heavens no—can you give me any reason why I should?

LIZ: You—you want to be tied to a man who—who——

NANCY: Loves you? (*Looks at her.*) Positively! (*Pause.*) I am a modest woman, but if Johnny leaves me for you it is obvious, unless I prevent it, he is starting a divorce court career unexcelled by any Duke!

LIZ (*laughs ironically*): I see—that is your way of stopping us going?

NANCY: You love each other so much why should I think that would stop you? But if I thought there was the slightest fear you wouldn't take him, I'd be very inclined to change my view!

LIZ (*angrily*): You want him to go, but you won't divorce him—I don't understand that!

NANCY: It's quite simple—if Johnny spent a few years with you, it would completely assure me of one of the happiest middle and old ages a woman has ever known!

LIZ (*angrily*): Would it—well, let me tell you this—if you refuse to release Johnny, there isn't a man or woman you know who wouldn't despise you for it!

NANCY: I don't know—a number of people I know have, under similar circumstances, divorced and married a second time—a percentage of those would see my point!

LIZ (*angrily—crosses away a step*): Would they?

NANCY: But this great concern for marriage worries me—don't tell me it's Johnny's position and not Johnny you love!

ACT TWO

LIZ (*turns to her*): I don't care a damn about his position!

NANCY: I'm glad—because, between you and me, being a Duchess isn't a bit like our mothers bring us up to believe it is!

LIZ: Let me tell you—whether you divorce him or not, I shall never leave him!

NANCY: I'm relieved!—for a moment I thought perhaps you had acquired the American habit of having to marry every man you popped into bed with!

LIZ (*angrily*): You—how dare you insult me like this!

NANCY: I'm sorry—I didn't mean to.

LIZ (*angrily*): Anyway, there is one thing quite certain, you won't be taking this attitude in a year's time!

NANCY: Are you staying on an orange plantation with Johnny for a year?

LIZ (*in uncontrollable rage*): Two—three—if necessary!

NANCY: Then you'll go down to posterity as the only woman who has ever been stoned to death by oranges!

LIZ (*walks to left of table*): You insulting—

NANCY: Insulting? Didn't Johnny in this room a month ago tell you this thing would have to stop?

LIZ: Yes—and I agreed—that's why I said I'd go to South Africa!

NANCY: Because you knew if you stayed in England he wouldn't leave me!

LIZ: It isn't true. I said I'd go because—

NANCY: You knew your physical attraction for him was so strong that the thought of your being so far away, and no possibility of seeing you, would be more than he could bear, and he would either go with you or follow you—that's why you're going to South Africa!

LIZ: It isn't true!

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NANCY: But if you were under the impression that while you and he were sitting in the sun—that I, on a cold winter's day, would go into a witness box and perjure myself that you might live happily together ever after—you made a mistake!

LIZ: Johnny wouldn't be unhappy!

NANCY: Johnny deprived of Ascot—the Court—Lord Lieutenant of the County? (*Pause.*) God help you!

LIZ (*a step down*): These things mean nothing to Johnny!

NANCY (*chuckles—rises, crosses in front of table*): Oh, dear, what a lot of fun you're going to have discovering the real Johnny! But we must go and dress. So briefly, let me tell you—I find myself unable to join that large number of women who devote the best years of their life to some man, and then gallantly release him merely because a little thing like you, unhappy in her own life, is able to persuade him, by the use of every cheap feminine trick, of the unhappiness of his own!

LIZ: It's nothing of the sort! I love——

NANCY: So if it is security and position you want—I would be inclined to, shall we say, ponder. But if I was prepared to smash up what was obviously a most attractive home—I'd love him so much I wouldn't care a damn for friends, position, or divorce—I'd just go with him! (*Looks at clock.*) Oh, look at the time!—Liz, you must forgive me!

[*Nancy exits right—upstairs. Liz does not move.*]

Curtain.

ACT THREE

Scene: The same. Card table removed—also low table in front of settee.

Time: That evening.

Lady Bletchley enters right, followed by Liz, Molly and Dorothy.

LADY BLETCHLEY (*sits up right, sighs*): Once again I've eaten too much! Oh, dear, except for greediness, I'm such a nice woman!

DOROTHY (*laughs—stands left of Lady Bletchley's chair*): I'll play you one game of bezique, Emily!

LADY BLETCHLEY: What's the use? In a minute Nancy will send for us to go down and see the lake floodlit!

MOLLY (*in front of fireplace*): Isn't it a good idea? I'm longing to see it! It should look quite lovely. [*To Liz, who is in deep thought, and is crossing to piano:*] Wish you weren't going tomorrow, Liz?

LIZ: What? Oh, the reverse—I couldn't be looking forward to anything more—it's the waiting for tomorrow that is always such a bore when one is going away, don't you think? (*Sits right arm settee.*)

MOLLY: I agree!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*to Dorothy*): I thought Eric was a bit sharp with you tonight?

MOLLY (*laughs*): Darling, she did tell him at least nine times how delighted she was he was going to be married!

DOROTHY: Aren't men vain? He was quite hurt that I don't mind losing him.

LADY BLETCHLEY: You do a little, I suppose?

DOROTHY (*plaintively*): I've reached the stage when I know what he is going to say next, darling!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Time is ended! (*To Molly.*) Your old cup of tea was a bit down!

MOLLY: You can't expect a man to be very jolly who is dining on water for the first time in his life, do you? (*To Liz, who is going out centre.*) You mustn't go down to the lake until Nancy sends for us!

LIZ (*picks up wrap off piano stool*): I've got a headache—I'm going to sit outside in the porch!

DOROTHY: Like an aspirin?

LIZ: No, thanks! (*Goes out centre.*)

LADY BLETCHLEY: There's a gloomy one!

MOLLY (*sits stool right*): Something has happened! I have never seen a man in such a state of nerves as Johnny was at dinner!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Charles wasn't! Never have I seen a man so obviously delighted as he is at the prospect of losing his wife for the winter!

[*Dorothy crosses to piano—then down left—sits left arm settee.*]

MOLLY: His delight was simply disgusting!

[*Paul enters right.*]

You didn't let Hugo drink anything?

PAUL: He cried—he implored! (*Shakes his head.*) But we never gave in!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Why don't the others come in here?

PAUL (*crossing to left of Lady Bletchley*): They are coming—Charles is so sad at losing his wife to-morrow he's finishing the brandy!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Don't tell me he's even jollier than when we left?

PAUL: Unbelievable—but he is! Where's Nancy?

MOLLY: Down at the lake! I believe you've got an eye to Nancy!

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PAUL: Two! I love her! She's been to me the best friend I ever had.

LADY BLETCHLEY: Russian, I like you!

PAUL (*takes her hand—kisses it*): I'm glad—because I like you!

LADY BLETCHLEY (*looks at him*): I'm extremely glad, young man, I'm not twenty years younger!

[*Paul crosses up centre. Charles enters right, followed by Hugo, Archie, Reggie and Johnny.*]

CHARLES (*walks briskly into the room in high spirits*): Here I am!

LADY BLETCHLEY: Well, it's nothing to be excited about!

CHARLES (*crosses to Lady Bletchley*): Now, now, Emily! That's not the spirit! (*Takes her hand; smacks it.*) You must be punished!

[*Paul laughs, then goes out centre.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY: Don't do that, you idiot!

CHARLES (*to Hugo, who is crossing centre*): Cheer up, Hugo, old boy—be gay—be bright! Life's full of fun!

HUGO (*looks up at him*): You're making me sick!

[*Hugo crosses up right. Archie sits down right. Johnny crosses up right and then to piano—Reggie in front of fireplace.*]

CHARLES: I don't care—by George, I feel well! You're coming to stay with the lonely old bachelor, Emily?

LADY BLETCHLEY: If you promise not to be so damned bright, I will!

CHARLES: Tomorrow night I'm giving a supper party to dear Old Em! And I now ask you all to come! (*Crosses up right—joins Hugo—drinks brandy.*)

[*Eric enters right.*]

DOROTHY: I'd adore to! I'm so glad you are going to be married, Eric!

ERIC (*irritably—crosses up left behind piano*): So you've said nine times!

DOROTHY: Darling!

ARCHIE (*rises*): Personally I am very sorry Eric is going to be married!

DOROTHY: Why?

ARCHIE: I hate new faces about the house!

[*They all turn and watch Archie going slowly to the door—he goes out centre.*]

LADY BLETCHLEY (*to Johnny, who is playing piano with one finger*): Are you playing by ear, or from music, Johnny dear?

JOHNNY (*rises and stands by piano*): Can't one do what one likes with one's own piano?

LADY BLETCHLEY: Of course—I never thought of that!

[*Liz enters centre.*]

DOROTHY: Feeling better, Liz!

LIZ (*centre*): I'm sorry I don't! I'm shivering! Is it cold?

CHARLES (*anxiously—crosses to her*): Don't tell me you've got a temperature, darling!

LIZ: I hope not!

[*Charles crosses up right. Footman enters centre to Lady Bletchley.*]

FOOTMAN: Her Grace would like you all to come down to the lake!

[*Exit footman.*]

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LADY BLETCHLEY (*rises*): Oh! Come along, Dorothy!

[*Eric exits centre. Dorothy and Lady Bletchley exit centre.*]

LIZ (*whispers to Johnny*): I'll be back. (*Starts to go out.*)

CHARLES (*follows her*): Are you wise to go out if you don't feel well, darling?

LIZ: I'm all right!

[*Charles and Liz exit centre.*]

MOLLY (*crosses to Hugo up centre*): Come on, sweet, come and see the lovely lake all lit up!

HUGO: I'd rather see one brandy and soda than all the flood lighting in the world!

MOLLY: If you're a good boy, you shall have one as soon as we get home!

HUGO: Can't we go home now?

MOLLY: In a few minutes—I've ordered the car!

[*They exit centre.*]

REGGIE: Can't for the life of me understand why, after an excellent dinner, anyone wants to go and see flood lighting!

JOHNNY (*crosses to below settee*): You'll offend Nancy if you don't!

REGGIE: As I shall offend her if I do—I'll stay here! (*Sits chair up right.*) I say, what was the matter with Liz, at dinner—hardly said a word—is there anything wrong, old boy?

JOHNNY (*anxiously*): Did she tell you anything was?

REGGIE: No. Perhaps she didn't feel well!

JOHNNY: She was all right when I went up to dress!

[*Liz enters. She comes quickly into the room.*]

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REGGIE: I say, you haven't been long!

LIZ (*makes sign to Johnny to get rid of him*): No, it was cold! (*Puts wrap on piano.*)

REGGIE: I think you were wise to come back.

JOHNNY: Do you ever know when you are not wanted?

REGGIE: I ought to—I've had a hell of a lot of experience!

JOHNNY: Go—and—see—the flood—lighting!

REGGIE: What? Oh! (*Rises—as he walks to door:*) My mind never works well after dinner! (*Exits centre.*)

JOHNNY: God—I've been worried! What was the matter with you at dinner?

LIZ (*angrily*): Matter? Why didn't you warn me that you had told Nancy we were going tomorrow?

JOHNNY: I tried to, but you were out with Charles, and—(*Stops—quickly alters his tone.*) Has Nancy—

LIZ (*almost shouting*): Couldn't you tell me when I came in? Pass me a note—or let me know in some way?

JOHNNY: How could I? The room was full of people, and I meant to tell you as we were walking up the stairs before dinner, and then you were called to the telephone!

LIZ (*angrily—crosses down centre*): Telephone! (*Raising her voice.*) Why did you have to tell her—I begged you not to!

JOHNNY: She made me so damned angry, I lost my temper so badly I liked telling her! She made a scene.

LIZ (*crying*): I'll never, never forgive her as long as I live for the things she said to me!

JOHNNY (*crosses to her—gives her handkerchief*): Don't cry please!

LIZ (*her back to him*): How I got through dinner tonight I shall never understand!

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JOHNNY: I realized something was wrong—I thought I had done something to upset you!

LIZ: You ought to have known by her damned gaiety alone that she had been rude to me!

JOHNNY: I suppose she tried to persuade you not to let me go with you tomorrow?

LIZ: You flatter yourself—(*Crosses him and sits left on settee.*) If there is one thing she wants more than anything else in the world, it is for you to go with me tomorrow!

JOHNNY (*with hurt dignity*): Really?

LIZ: I have never resented anything so much as the things she said about you!

JOHNNY (*dignified—crosses and sits on settee*): Indeed? Well, if she wants me to go so much, what's all this fuss about?

LIZ (*looks at him*): Had you any idea if you went away with me she would never divorce you?

JOHNNY: Of course not! Did she tell you that?

LIZ: Nothing else!

JOHNNY: Obviously she was angry and said a lot of things she didn't mean. But it's ridiculous, of course she will!

LIZ: I'm quite—quite certain she won't!

JOHNNY: In time, of course she will—and if she doesn't what does it matter?

LIZ (*looks at him in astonishment*): What—does—it—matter?

JOHNNY: You don't care, do you?

LIZ (*angrily*): You mean you would take me away tomorrow knowing you could never marry me?

JOHNNY: Certainly! What do I care about marriage?

LIZ: Johnny, are you serious?

JOHNNY: Certainly! My liking for you, I hope, is much superior to any stupid convention!

LIZ (*looks at him in astonishment*): You would let me

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go through the rest of my life just being your mistress?

JOHNNY: Liz, that's a word I dislike intensely! I have told you many times it doesn't apply to you! My liking for you is——

LIZ (*angrily*): This is not a moment for sentiment—Who else would think so?

JOHNNY (*pauses—looks at her*): You don't mean that if Nancy refuses to release me you won't come tomorrow?

LIZ: What else? (*He looks at her—doesn't answer.*) Can't you see how impossible it would be?

JOHNNY (*pauses*): Then all the things we've said about our love for each other—how different it was to everyone else's—the sacrifice I was prepared to make for it—mean nothing!

LIZ (*angrily*): What sacrifice are you making?

JOHNNY (*with great dignity*): To leave one's wife and children, and face the anger of public opinion, seems to me—I may be wrong, of course—to be a small sacrifice!

LIZ: But if you tired of me you could always return to them.

JOHNNY (*outraged*): Are you suggesting, once having left with you, I am capable of ever leaving you? I would have thought after all the things I've told you, you would have trusted me a little more!

LIZ: Please! You know I have the highest opinion of you! But can't you see my position? Can't you see I would never have any if I lived unmarried with you?

JOHNNY: I don't understand! I thought we were going away quite independent of all those things, just two people who loved each other and wanted to live their lives together!

LIZ (*irritably—rises and crosses left end settee*): Oh—how can I make you understand! What are you going to

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do when you are asked out to dine, and I am not asked?

JOHNNY: Refuse!

LIZ (*in despair*): Oh, God—even if you didn't go, it's possible you would like to, isn't it? And then you'd begin to dislike me!

JOHNNY: I suppose I'm stupid, but I don't care a damn if my friends don't ask me to dine because I am not married to you!

LIZ: Oh! Can't you see! To make me feel my position acutely—to make an example of me, every woman in London would ask you without me!

JOHNNY: Why?

LIZ (*angrily*): Are you a damn fool, or just pretending to be one?

JOHNNY (*with dignity—rises—crosses right a few steps*): I'm sorry!

LIZ (*quickly realizing what she has done—crosses to him*): Please—please forgive me; be understanding, I'm upset, I don't know what I am saying!

JOHNNY: Very well! Why shouldn't my friends ask you? Nearly every one of them has a lover or a mistress!

LIZ (*eagerly*): Exactly—but they are married!

JOHNNY: Well?

LIZ (*controlling her anger with difficulty*): But don't you see by being married, the difference it makes?

JOHNNY: You can do then what you like, you mean?

LIZ: Of course—it's the only possible way a woman can ever have any freedom!

JOHNNY: So this statement so frequently made that marriage is an obsolete, old-fashioned institution and doesn't matter any more, isn't true?

LIZ: Of course it isn't true. For a woman, it's stronger today than it has ever been! Do you suppose all the mothers who spend their evenings carting their daughters round the drawing rooms of London

looking for a husband for them, would let me get away with this?

JOHNNY: And this beautiful love of ours is only real if we marry?

LIZ: It would be divine, then! We have so much in common; we love each other so much, we would be terribly happy! Don't you want to marry me?

JOHNNY: Naturally—but I wish you had told me all this before I told Nancy I loved you and was going away with you tomorrow!

LIZ: It never entered my mind she wouldn't release you!

JOHNNY (*smiles*): True—I've misunderstood the whole thing! A lot of men, I suppose, would envy me!

LIZ: Why?

JOHNNY: I appear to be on the verge of not only losing my wife, but the woman I love as well! (*Pause—crosses down left.*) What do you want me to do?

LIZ (*follows him*): Make Nancy see what a cruel, wicked thing she is doing, point out to her how unhappy we are all going to be if she refuses to release you!

JOHNNY: You happen to be able to make Charles do anything—but I must point out to you, I've got to face an obstinate and peculiarly intelligent woman!

LIZ: Johnny, you can't let me down—you must make her see what a cruel thing she would be doing! Don't you want to go away with me—don't you love me?

JOHNNY: This is more a moment of reality than sentiment. (*He looks at her.*) You're quite definite, if Nancy refuses you won't come?

LIZ: How can I? Surely you would be the last person to expect me to?

JOHNNY: I see! You're going home tonight, aren't you?

LIZ: As soon as Charles comes back from the garden!

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JOHNNY: I'll telephone you and let you know what Nancy says!

LIZ: No—I'll telephone; it will save a lot of explanation to Charles! You do realize I must know at once!

JOHNNY: Quite!

LIZ: And you will make her, won't you?

[*Paul enters centre.*]

PAUL: May I ring for my things to be put in Archie's car?—he is taking me back to London! (*Crosses to fireplace and rings.*)

JOHNNY: Of course!

LIZ (*crosses to piano—gets wrap*): I must go and find my maid—Paul, you might tell Charles I've gone to the car, will you? (*Crosses to right.*)

PAUL: Pleasure!

LIZ (*to Johnny*): You might come and say goodbye to me!

JOHNNY: Of course I will!

[*Liz and Johnny exit right. Paul watches them going—crosses to right centre; smiles. Footman enters right.*]

PAUL: Would you please have my things put in Lord Rayne's car?

FOOTMAN: Yes, sir. (*Exits right.*)

[*Charles enters centre; crosses to Paul.*]

CHARLES (*anxiously*): Is she all right?

PAUL: I'm not sure—I should say she looked a little flushed!

CHARLES (*crossing down right*): God—I hope she hasn't got a temperature! Good-night! (*Exits right.*)

[*Nancy enters centre—crosses to Paul.*]

NANCY: Wasn't my flood lighting a success?

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PAUL: It was beautiful!

NANCY: I'm so sorry you've got to go tonight!

PAUL: I'm always sorry to go away from here!

NANCY: That's charming of you—but you know you can come when you like!

PAUL: I'm very grateful to you! Has Archie gone to the car, do you know?

NANCY: I'm afraid they are waiting for you!

PAUL: Then I must go! (*Takes her hand; looks at her.*)
Er—(*Stops.*)

NANCY: What were you going to say?

PAUL (*shakes his head; smiles*): It's no good; I'll always be shy with you! (*Kisses her hand.*) Good night!

NANCY: Good night!

[*Paul exits right. Nancy remains for a moment watching the door where he went out. She is obviously thinking of him. Slowly, she walks to writing table, gets portfolio and pencil, sits on settee, begins to write a letter. Johnny enters right; crosses to right centre. Nancy looks up, then goes on writing.*]

Johnny dear, why didn't you come and see the lake? It was quite lovely!

JOHNNY (*crosses to centre*): I'm sure it was!

NANCY: Quite, quite lovely! (*Pauses.*) When do you leave, darling, tonight or in the morning?

JOHNNY: I wonder if you would be good enough to stop writing that letter?

NANCY (*goes on writing*): Go on—I can listen—but I must write it tonight—it's to the local butcher; you've no idea how the brute has been robbing us!

JOHNNY: I'm not interested!

NANCY: But you must be interested! Now that you have two expensive women to keep——

JOHNNY (*crosses to her*): Will you stop writing that letter at once!

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NANCY: My dear Johnny, really! Aren't you—(*He seizes letter; throws it on floor.*) How very attractive!

JOHNNY: I understand it is not your intention to release me? (*She looks straight in front of her; doesn't answer.*) Did you hear what I said?

NANCY: Perfectly! And when you've picked up my letter, I'll answer any question you like—but not until!

JOHNNY: Look here, Nancy—I'm very serious, you know! (*Pauses.*) Is it true you are not going to release me? (*Pause.*) Will you answer my question or not? (*Pause.*) Very well, there's nothing more to say! Good night!

[*Johnny walks to left door, opens it, goes out, banging door as he goes. Nancy pauses for a second or two, turns her head towards door, looks to see if by chance he is still in the room—turns—looks at the audience—she appears to be thinking what to do. The door opens. Johnny enters. He is now wearing an overcoat, and around his neck a silk scarf. He walks quickly to table; opens drawer after drawer, evidently unable to find what he is looking for.*]

I have mislaid my cheque book. (*Pause.*) Do you happen to know where it is? (*Pause. Crosses to left end settee.*) Oh, stop being so damn ridiculous! (*Pause.*) This is really preposterous! Oh, for God's sake! (*Bends down, picks up letter and gives it to her—then crosses to right end settee.*)

NANCY (*smiles at him*): Thank you!

JOHNNY: Now will you answer my question?

NANCY: In the left hand drawer!

JOHNNY: Not the cheque book.

NANCY: I certainly told Liz I would not divorce you!

JOHNNY: May I ask your reason?

NANCY: It was slightly sadistic. I wanted to enjoy her disappointment.

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JOHNNY: Well, you're quite wrong! She isn't the least concerned whether you divorce me or not!

NANCY: That's a love I'm most sympathetic to!

JOHNNY: So I take it you are willing to release me?

NANCY: Do you want me to?

JOHNNY: Certainly!

NANCY: But what a fool you are! If she's indifferent, and will go away with you tomorrow, whether I divorce you or not, look at the strong position you are in!

JOHNNY: In what way?

NANCY: Because—mind you, I think it most unlikely you'll ever tire of a beautiful nature like hers—but if you did, and you're still married to me—Aren't you very hot in that coat?

JOHNNY: No—go on with what you were saying!

NANCY: All you would have to do would be to send me a telegram and I would at once be very ill and you'd have to come back to me!

JOHNNY: If I go away with her—(*Quickly corrects himself.*) I mean when I go away with her tomorrow, I propose to stand by what I've done to the end.

[*Nancy winks at him.*]

It's no good winking at me. I mean it! (*He crosses right a bit.*)

NANCY: Then I've got it all wrong. It's you who won't go unless I release you?

JOHNNY: How can I? Look at the position I put her in if I do.

NANCY: Position? Does such a material thing as position play any part in such a love as yours?

JOHNNY (*crosses to her*): Surely you must realise—Good God, you know the world! You know every woman in London would ask me to dine and completely ignore her under such circumstances!

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NANCY: Forgive me, but isn't it a little early in your love to be thinking about going out to dinner?

JOHNNY (*angrily—crossing to centre*): If you're just going to be damned irritating, it's no good going on!

NANCY: That's the last thing I want to do. But to ask me to give up my position—which I frankly admit I like very much—just because you and the woman you love want to go out to dinner together, is too much!

JOHNNY: My God, you're the most maddening woman I've ever met! Can't you see that all these women who cart their daughters around the drawing rooms of London, would unite in making her life impossible? (*Crossing to her.*)

NANCY (*throws her arms in the air with delight*): That's Liz! I know it is—I can hear her saying it, the little—well, no matter!

JOHNNY: Are you suggesting I can't think for myself?

NANCY: You're much too selfish to have thought of that, darling!

JOHNNY (*crosses to centre*): Obviously there is nothing more to say!

NANCY: There is. It's true. I did tell Liz I wouldn't release you. But that isn't what I tell you. I realize how much you love her and how unkind it would be of me to keep you apart—so, Johnny, I want to tell you, you are free!

JOHNNY (*gloomily*): Thank you.

NANCY: Not at all—after all, we were both very young when we married; and although you've always been fond of me, the moment you met Liz, there was the first love and the last love of your life. (*He appears to be uncomfortable.*) Isn't that right, Johnny, dear?

JOHNNY: Well, I suppose that is what unfortunately happened!

NANCY: And I've no doubt you often told her how different your love for her was than anybody else's—how very ugly theirs was compared with yours—and she just looked up at you with those simple blue eyes, and said so innocently: "But Johnny, I'm only your mistress." How that word cut you to the quick! How you implored her to believe she was nothing of the kind!

JOHNNY (*embarrassed and angry*): You—you—you've been listening at doors!

NANCY (*rises and crosses to him*): And you might have even said, "My love for you isn't physical—it's your companionship I love so much—looking at beautiful pictures—cathedrals—countless things I never even thought of doing with Nancy, but love doing with you."

JOHNNY (*grabs her wrist*): You have been eaves-dropping!

NANCY: Certainly!

JOHNNY (*outraged—steps back*): Oh! How could you do such a mean, contemptible thing!

NANCY (*crosses left—puts portfolio on desk*): How could I—it's the best pastime in the world! I've never enjoyed myself so much in all my life! No keyhole will ever be safe from me again! And any letters left on the table addressed to someone else—well——

JOHNNY (*angrily*): It's unbelievable! That you would dare listen to—to——

NANCY (*crossing back to him*): Such damn drivel? I'll tell you something—no woman has crossed the Channel in more gales than I have—but it's the first time in my life I have wanted to call out: "Steward, basin!"

JOHNNY: Well, this is the end!

NANCY: Of course it is. But only because she won't go with you tomorrow if I don't agree to divorce you.

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JOHNNY: You listened to that as well?

NANCY: I didn't need to. Her face when I left her in this room before dinner described it perfectly! But two people who love each other as you do, should be compelled to live the rest of their lives together. So, Johnny, for that reason, and others I won't go into, you are free.

[*Footman enters right.*]

FOOTMAN (*to Johnny*): Mrs. Halton would like to speak to you on the telephone.

NANCY: Put her through here.

JOHNNY: No—one minute.

NANCY (*to footman*): It's all right—put her through here! (*Sits right arm settee.*)

[*Footman exits right.*]

JOHNNY (*turning, discovers her*): You're not intending to be here, are you?

NANCY: Of course!—you don't think I'd miss this, do you?

JOHNNY (*crossing to door left*): Very well—I shall speak to her in my sitting room.

NANCY (*delighted—follows him down left*): I wish you would—then I shall be able to listen at the door! I should love that!

JOHNNY: Then I won't speak to her at all!

NANCY: I'd love to tell her the good news myself. (*Goes to telephone—lifts receiver.*)

JOHNNY (*stops her—takes telephone from her*): You'll do nothing of the sort! (*Pauses. Puts his hand on telephone—pauses.*) Will you go away?

NANCY: If you don't tell her at once you're free I'll give the message to that footman to give her! (*Crosses up centre.*)

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JOHNNY (*pauses*): Hullo! You've been kept waiting—I'm sorry! What?—Oh! The news is—(*Puts his hand on mouthpiece of telephone.*) For God's sake, go away! (*Nancy shakes her head—sits up right.*) The news is—(*pause*)—Nancy won't release me! What do you mean, I didn't try? Hullo—Hullo—Hullo——!
NANCY: What's happened?

JOHNNY: She's either put the receiver down or fallen in a faint! (*Puts down telephone.*)

NANCY: Oh! I do hope she's not fallen on something sharp! (*Looks at him.*) Well? (*He is quite unable to find any words.*) The idea, of course, was you hoped I wouldn't release you—implore you not to leave me—which would free you of her—and at the same time always leave you in a strong position with me.

JOHNNY (*crossing to below settee*): That was the idea I had in my mind!

NANCY (*smiles*): Oh, well—that's very masculine. When did you decide not to go?

JOHNNY (*crosses to right end settee*): She decided that quite easily for me in this room tonight!

NANCY: I was sure she would do that! (*Looks at him.*) Johnny, did you mean those sick-making things I heard you say to her?

JOHNNY: You ought to have heard some of the others I've said to her!

NANCY (*starts*): Oh, they weren't worse?

JOHNNY (*nods his head*): Much!

NANCY: Did you mean them when you said them?

JOHNNY: When you are physically infatuated by a woman you are much more concerned with poetry than you are with sincerity!

NANCY (*smiles*): I can forgive you a lot for that, Johnny. But your love of cathedrals was——

JOHNNY (*sits right arm settee*): Cathedrals bore me as much as she hates picture galleries!

NANCY: And if I hadn't prevented it, for a fake thing

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like that, you would have left me and everything that means anything to you?

JOHNNY (*nods*): Not wanting to—and conscious of the horrible thing I was doing——

NANCY: Why?

JOHNNY: Weakness of character—contempt for myself—the knowledge you knew—promises—I'd got myself into such a hell of a mess—I was running away from myself more than I was running away with her. Why didn't you let me go?

NANCY: I don't know—one doesn't leave someone one adores because they have diphtheria, scarlet fever, or mumps! So why should one after seven years leave for a temporary disease like infatuation?

JOHNNY: I am ashamed of myself!

NANCY (*laughs*): So you ought to be. But I'm no heroine! Shall I tell you the only reason I would ever divorce you?

JOHNNY: What?

NANCY: Liberty from all women. We are all—(*Stops.*)—well, you know what I think Liz is. (*She rises.*) Oh, dear, look at the time!

JOHNNY (*rises—crosses centre*): Would you like me to go away for a little?

NANCY: Whatever you like, Johnny!

JOHNNY: Then I should like to stay here!

NANCY: I'd like that too.

JOHNNY (*he looks at her; speaks hesitatingly*): You wouldn't give me permission to be a little sentimental, would you?

NANCY: That's the only thing in the world that everybody would give you. (*Johnny turns away, embarrassed.*) Come on, Johnny, come on.

JOHNNY: I wish I wasn't so damned conceited then I wouldn't be so shy.

NANCY (*holding out her hand*): Darling!

JOHNNY (*crosses to her—takes her hand*): You—you—

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you're the most generous—most understanding—most divine woman in the world.

NANCY: I'm sorry you couldn't include attractive.

JOHNNY: I wanted to awfully, but I thought it a little too soon.

NANCY: How long will you believe all these charming things of me, Johnny?

JOHNNY: I'm sure to die first—until then. You must see it's my truthful face!

NANCY: I don't know whether I want to smack it very hard or kiss it.

JOHNNY: So long as you want to do either I'll be content. Why have you been so terribly nice to me, Nancy?

NANCY: Because I love you, you horrid little beast. *(She kisses his cheek, and starts to leave.)*

JOHNNY *(holding her hands)*: Don't go.

NANCY: Johnny—the children have been so tiresome today—and I'm sorry to tell you the butler got drunk—and for the life of me I don't know why I'm so tired tonight, but if you would like to come up to my room, and sit on my bed, and talk to me, while I take my make-up off, I'd like that awfully.

Curtain.

PLAYS OF THE YEAR

Plays of the Year was launched in 1949. So far the following nineteen volumes have appeared, chosen and edited by J. C. Trewin. It is regretted that Volumes 1, 2, 4 and 8 are now out of print.

VOLUME 1: 1948-9

COCKPIT by BRIDGET BOLAND

FAMILY PORTRAIT by LENORE COFFEE &

W. JOYCE COWAN

THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE by JOHN

DIGHTON

THE MISER by MOLIÈRE; adapted by MILES MALLESON

THE PARAGON by ROLAND & MICHAEL PERTWEE

DON'T LISTEN LADIES! by SACHA GUITRY;

adapted by STEPHEN POWYS & GUY BOLTON

VOLUME 2: 1949

ANN VERONICA by RONALD GOW;

based on the novel by H. G. WELLS

DARK OF THE MOON by HOWARD RICHARDSON

& WILLIAM BERNEY

BLACK CHIFFON by LESLEY STORM

THE LATE EDWINA BLACK by WILLIAM DINNER

& WILLIAM MORUM

THE KING OF FRIDAY'S MEN by MICHAEL MOLLOY

BEFORE THE PARTY by RODNEY ACKLAND;

from a story by W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM

VOLUME 3: 1949-50

THE HOLLY AND THE IVY by WYNYARD BROWNE

YOUNG WIVES' TALE by RONALD JEANS

BONAVENTURE by CHARLOTTE HASTINGS

CASTLE IN THE AIR by ALAN MELVILLE

TARTUFFE by MOLIÈRE; adapted by MILES MALLESON

TOP OF THE LADDER by TYRONE GUTHRIE

VOLUME 4: 1950

SEAGULLS OVER SORRENTO by HUGH HASTINGS
HIS EXCELLENCY by DOROTHY & CAMPBELL

CHRISTIE

BACKGROUND by W. CHETHAM-STRODE
TO DOROTHY, A SON by ROGER MACDOUGALL
THE THISTLE & THE ROSE by WILLIAM

DOUGLAS-HOME

VOLUME 5: 1950-51

LACE ON HER PETTICOAT by AIMÉE STUART
COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS by RONALD JEANS
DOCTOR'S DELIGHT by MOLIÈRE;

adapted by SIR BARRY JACKSON

THE GENTLE GUNMAN by ROGER MACDOUGALL
THE CHILDREN'S HOUR by LILLIAN HELLMAN

VOLUME 6: 1951

SAINT'S DAY by JOHN WHITING
THE PRODIGIOUS SNOB (*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*)
by MOLIÈRE; adapted by MILES MALLESON

THE SAME SKY by YVONNE MITCHELL
WHO GOES THERE! by JOHN DIGHTON
GUNPOWDER, TREASON AND PLOT

by HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

VOLUME 7: 1951-52

THE YOUNG ELIZABETH by JENNETTE DOWLING
NIGHTMARE ABBEY by ANTHONY SHARP;

from THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK'S novel

UNDER THE SYCAMORE TREE by SAMUEL SPEWACK
THIRD PERSON by ANDREW ROSENTHAL
DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

by HUGH ROSS WILLIAMSON

VOLUME 8: 1952-53

DEAR CHARLES (*Les Enfants D'Edouard*) by MARC-GILBERT SAUVAJON and FREDERICK JACKSON;

adapted by ALAN MELVILLE

AFFAIRS OF STATE by LOUIS VERNEUIL

MURDER MISTAKEN by JANET GREEN

FOR BETTER, FOR WORSE by ARTHUR WATKYN

THE WALTZ OF THE TOREADORS (*La Valse des Toréadors*) by JEAN ANOUILH;

adapted by LUCIENNE HILL

VOLUME 9: 1953

TRIAL AND ERROR by KENNETH HORNE

ANASTASIA by MARCELLE MAURETTE;

adapted by GUY BOLTON

THE RETURN by BRIDGET BOLAND

AS LONG AS THEY'RE HAPPY

by VERNON SYLVAINE

BIRTHDAY HONOURS by PAUL JONES

VOLUME 10: 1953-54

THE PRISONER by BRIDGET BOLAND

THE SCHOOL FOR WIVES by MOLIÈRE;

adapted by MILES MALLESON

MEET A BODY by FRANK LAUNDER and SYDNEY

GILLIAT

WAITING FOR GILLIAN by RONALD MILLAR

BOTH ENDS MEET by ARTHUR MACRAE

VOLUME 11: 1954

SIMON AND LAURA by ALAN MELVILLE

THE PARTY SPIRIT by PETER JONES and JOHN JOWETT

THE MISANTHROPE by MOLIÈRE;

adapted by MILES MALLESON

SGANARELLE by MOLIÈRE; adapted by MILES MALLESON

THE LITTLE GLASS CLOCK by HUGH MILLS

SERIOUS CHARGE by PHILIP KING

VOLUME 12: 1954-55

THE LONG SUNSET by R. C. SHERRIFF
SOUTH by JULIEN GREEN
UNCERTAIN JOY by CHARLOTTE HASTINGS
SAILOR, BEWARE! by PHILIP KING and FALKLAND
CARY
THE SHADOW OF DOUBT by NORMAN KING

VOLUME 13: 1955

THE WHOLE TRUTH by PHILIP MACKIE
SMALL HOTEL by REX FROST
THE ERMINE by JEAN ANOUILH;
translated by MIRIAM JOHN
DEAD ON NINE by JACK POPPLEWELL

VOLUME 14: 1955-56

THE STRONG ARE LONELY by FRITZ
HOCHWÄLDER; translated by EVA LE GALLIENNE
THE HOUSE BY THE LAKE by HUGH MILLS
ONE BRIGHT DAY by SIGMUND MILLER
ANNE BOLEYN by PETER ALBERY

VOLUME 15: 1956

THE TELESCOPE by R. C. SHERRIFF
MEDEA by JEAN ANOUILH; translated by LOTHIAN
SMALL
PLAINTIFF IN A PRETTY HAT by HUGH and
MARGARET WILLIAMS
**THE STRANGE CASE OF DR. JEKYLL AND MR.
HYDE** by LANCE SIEVEKING;
adapted from R. L. STEVENSON'S novel
BE GOOD, SWEET MAID by C. E. WEBBER

VOLUME 16: 1956-57

A DEAD SECRET by RODNEY ACKLAND
THE IRON HARP by JOSEPH O'CONOR
DEAR DELINQUENT by JACK POPPLEWELL
THE PUBLIC PROSECUTOR
by FRITZ HOCHWÄLDER; translated by KITTY BLACK

VOLUME 17: 1957-58

NOT IN THE BOOK by ARTHUR WATKYN

THE DOCK BRIEF by JOHN MORTIMER

WHAT SHALL WE TELL CAROLINE?

by JOHN MORTIMER

PADDLE YOUR OWN CANOE by MAX REGNIER;

based on a scenario by ANDRE GILLOIS.

Adapted by LUCIENNE HILL

THE HAPPY MAN by HUGH and

MARGARET WILLIAMS

VOLUME 18: 1958

ANY OTHER BUSINESS by GEORGE ROSS and

CAMPBELL SINGER

THE QUEEN AND THE WELSHMAN

by ROSEMARY ANNE SISSON

THE PARTY by JANE ARDEN

TOUCH IT LIGHT by ROBERT STOREY

VOLUME 19: 1958-59

THE GRASS IS GREENER by HUGH and

MARGARET WILLIAMS

THE IMAGINARY INVALID by MOLIÈRE;

adapted by MILES MALLESON

THE SPLENDID OUTCASTS

by ROSEMARY ANNE SISSON

LET THEM EAT CAKE by FREDERICK LONSDALE

Vol. 11 1954

SIMON AND LAURA by ALAN MELVILLE

THE PARTY SPIRIT by PETER JONES and JOHN JOWETT

THE MISANTHROPE by MOLIÈRE, adapted by MILES MALLESON

SGANARELLE by MOLIÈRE, adapted by MILES MALLESON

THE LITTLE GLASS CLOCK by HUGH MILLS

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